An Ill Fitting Suit

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An Ill Fitting Suit

by black_dranzer_1119

Summary

Never really familiar with the concept of family, Will was, for the most part, content to spend the rest of his days with his dogs. When news of a serial killer and potential mass murderer comes to light, however, Jack is forced to request his assistance to track down the person or people responsible. As an omega Will can't work this case alone, which forces him into the care of Doctor Hannibal Lecter, who seems to have developed more than just a professional curiosity for Will.

Notes

Though this is a Secret Santa story, I have actually been working on this a lot longer than that and so I was very glad that I have been able to work on this as part of my Secret Santa gift. On the plus side, this is a lot longer than it would have been otherwise. I didn't have that many restrictions on what to write except Alpha/Omega, so I hope they don't mind it being ABO. As this is such a long story I can't realistically avoid het, but the main pairing will be Hannibal/Will, I promise. This story does have canonical level violence, so basically; only the dogs are truly safe. It will not contain sexual violence, as I would no more want to write it than my prompter wishes to reader it. Finally, I do not live in America or have ever visited so there are probably some issues, but I hope they are not too major. This is my first attempt at ABO, so I hope you all enjoy.

Broken

Will was thirteen-years-old and in class when he first experienced a heat. Statistically speaking, that was an excellent sign, as most male omegas didn't get a heat until they were at least fifteen. Heats tended to also be less frequent, but the later accompanying period were a lot more painful. None of that particularly helped Will get through it, though, as he found himself more distracted than usual. The days leading up to it had been hardly any better, but now his skin itched and he felt almost hyper-aware of everything going on around him.

To make the situation worse, he then had to go home and tell his father; probably looking like every awkward omega on TV when they came out to their parents. His father had taken it pretty well, though Will could tell that his father had been hoping Will would be beta like him or possibly an alpha like his own father had been. Will had flushed when his father had asked him if Will wanted him to pick up some supplies, and Will had immediately begged the negative. It hadn’t stopped him from waiting until almost the last moment to buy them and then grabbing the first two packs that he came across that would work.

The first day of his period was a nightmare. He had cramps, nausea and to top it off, he had to insert and then remove small, bullet shaped pieces of cotton every four to six hours and then line his underwear before going to bed. The fact that Will was a restless sleeper was just a bonus, so he found the pad he had used had somehow become completely useless during the night. This resulted in Will being grateful, for first time he could ever remember, that he was tasked with doing the laundry, as he had to soak his underwear to get the blood out. This led to one cranky, miserable Will Graham, a fact which not even his father could miss and he had called the school to say that Will wouldn't be attending before Will even had to ask. The next day, Will had thought the worst was over, he didn't ache any more, the nausea seemed to have dissipated, and now the sticky, red liquid that his body continued to release seemed the least of his problems.

Then Will arrived at school.

Will had never been fond of school. He had never really been a social creature and the constant pressure wore at him until he wanted to scream some days. It would almost seemed contradictory, that he ached for a friend, but, for Will, it seemed as elusive as food and drink had been for Tantalus. It wasn't that he was the centre of attention or that he was ignored, but no one seemed to bond with him either. It made goodbyes fairly easy, at least, whenever he had to change schools, but until that point, Will had never been the reason they had relocated.

Since the 1920s, omega rights had grown rapidly, to the benefit of everyone and by 1989 there were many laws in place that combated discrimination, including the soon to be ratified rights for couples other than omega/alpha and beta/beta to marry. Unfortunately, there would always be the ones who were slow on the uptake, their parents being alpha/omega or beta/beta conservatives, who would continue to treat omegas as second, or even third class citizens. It didn't help that everywhere they looked there were examples of the hyper asculine alpha, fighting to save the world with their handy beta sidekick, while their hyper omminine, omega love interest would swoon and be generally useless while waiting to be rescued/ the

alpha to return etc. and that movies targeted towards omegas were just variations on the alpha/omega romance trope.

The thing about bullying, though, is that you never expect it will happen to you, until it does. For Will, who never felt like he was anything more than background noise, when he became the target of bullying by a group of fourteen and fifteen-year-old alphas, he had no idea how to handle it. After a week he tried to tell a teacher about it, but they passed it off as ‘alpha play’and told him to ’toughen up’. Will had heard of ‘alpha play’, most people had, but it had become a far less socially acceptable practice as omegas started to gain more rights, though it was rarely banned and enforced even less. In its most basic form, it was both a form of peacocking and a way of asserting dominance over the ‘weaker’target.

As Will trudged home one day after school, after having to borrow a clean uniform as his own was soaked in red paint, he had never felt more isolated in his life. That evening, over dinner, his father told him he was thinking about looking into jobs elsewhere, since he had run out of jobs to do where they were; despite his talk the week before of a new project starting up. Will was never sure exactly how much his father had known about his bullying, he didn't want to know, but the next school was better and that was all that mattered.

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Sometimes Will wonders if it was the conversation that he had with his father, when he came out, that made him decide to go into law enforcement. Historically, law enforcement was made up by alphas and betas, but with the increase in equality, the number of omega being accepted had doubled in ten years and tripled in the ten years after that. There were still those who said that the omegas place was at home, or at the very least in caring and nurturing roles, but Will’s mind was different and he could make a difference. So he would go and spend hours looking through criminal histories, mapping similarities, adjusting theories for differences. He could empathise with anybody, that was true, but if he wanted to be the best, he would have to know what made each one different than any other, no matter that the statistics often said the violent offenders were usually the alpha’s who have: something to prove; the need to dominate; or purely sadistic reasons. He just hoped that, when the time came, he wouldn't have to deal with the glass ceiling that omegas still had to deal with.

By the time Will got into homicide, he thought he was doing well. He was a better draw than most; he was fast and had a longer endurance; to speak nothing of his record in breaking cases. Then he was put on the Macey case and everything went to hell. Michelle Cooper was just like any other sixteen-year-old, omega girl, but then she had fallen in love with one of her omega classmates and they had begun a relationship. Michelle went to a private boarding school created by the church and one that had a very strict view on same gender relationships. Being expelled would probably have been better than what had resulted when her classmates found out, as they were both tormented constantly.

Three months later her boyfriend hung himself in the gymnasium.

When they finally caught up with Michelle, six of her classmates were dead and at least three were critically wounded. Michelle was standing in her dorm room with a knife in her hand and covered in blood. She wasn't a very large girl and she had curly blonde hair, large hazel eyes and freckles that dusted her nose and cheeks. Will remembers she was crying and his mind and heart went out to her. He tried to get her to put down the knife, attempting to keep his gun trained on her as he did so. Sometimes he wonders if he would have fired if he had more warning, but her eyes changed and she suddenly moved.

He froze.

Then that bloody knife was jammed into his shoulder and he ***screamed***. It was wrenched out of him and he collapsed. Michelle barely made it twelve steps before his back-up arrived and then she was a corpse. The investigation into what occurred in the dorm room revealed that he wasn't capable of performing his duties as a homicide detective and it was suggested that he find a different career choice. He didn't need another hint and handed in his resignation the following day. It didn't stop the up-an-coming tabloid reporter Freddie Lounds from trying to ruin whatever remained of his reputation and he spent the next year fixing boat motors as he tried to work out where to go from there.

Since he was stabbed... no, since he met ***her***, Will had been having nightmares regularly. That should have been enough to convince him that he just wasn't made out for that kind of work, that he was so clearly ***broken***, but the radio, the newspaper, even the television, when he was bothered to turn it on, haunted him. Far too often he found himself half way to standing to get the phone and report a theory on whatever particular crime he was learning about. Giving up, he set his sights on a Forensic Science major at George Washington University graduate school.

For a while, things got better again. He had a goal and was working towards it. Most days he could even forget the ache in his shoulder, if not the dreams and he thought he had a good thing going. It was then, in his graduating year that he decided to over reach and applied for the training program in the FBI. At the start, everything was going smoothly and he wondered if he had found his calling after all. Those thoughts had ended as he saw the expression on the beta who gave his psych evaluation. He must have stared at his marked assessments for hours that night, trying to think of something he could do, or if it was once again, the end of the road.

An email from one of his professors changed everything.

Professor Tracey Wayne had been the one who had reviewed his monograph on *Time of Death by Insect Activity* and as such, was one of the few people Will spoke to on a regular basis. Professor Tracy was also the only one that Will had spoken to about his failed application to the FBI. That didn't prepare him when he received an application for a teaching position at Quantico, with a recommendation attached, from Professor Tracey and three other members of faculty; two of which, Will hadn't thought would have been able to pick him out of a line up. Despite this, it took Will a full week before he sent it in and by then he was worried he was too late.

When he walked out of building three interviews later, his legs shaking underneath him, he was still trying to process the seven relatively simple words that had come out of the man’s

mouth at the end of the interview.

‘Congratulations Mister Graham, you've got the job.’

Powerless

Chapter Notes

> Planned on posting this earlier, but got caught up in stuff. This is one of my shorter chapters, so sorry about that. Hope you like it anyway. Thanks for reading.

When Will first met Abigail Hobbs, it was in the wake of her father's murder and the subsequent arrest of her mother. Will hadn't been quite sure what was being expected of him at the time, but he hadn't expected this. No one had. It wasn't something that could just be predicted, but it sure as hell made everything more complicated.

It hadn't been a very eventful meeting, by most people's standards... probably. Will wasn't really the best judge of that. He had just been called over to meet with Jack about something and she had been waiting in the room outside Jack's office. At the time he could remember himself thinking that she was just a pretty, young, alpha girl, but unremarkable and he probably would have continued to go on not knowing anything about her, but then she had said:

' Hello? '

' Hello, ' Will said, adjusting his glasses so that his line of sight was obscured when he looked at her. He suspected he knew who she was, but he didn't want to pry.

'My name 's Abigail. Are you waiting for Jack Crawford? ' Abigail said and Will nodded, not really sure what else to say to that. 'He likes to yell, doesn't he? ' Her voice went very soft then and Will wondered what it was that Jack had yelled at her about.

' So I 've heard, ' Will said. He had only met Jack the one time, when he had criticised the name given to the 'serial killer ' exhibition they were setting up. As far as Will was concerned, it was the last thing the FBI should have been a part of making and the name itself was insult to injury. Will wondered how much of Abigail 's home would be torn apart to put on display for the mindless masses who were just looking for a cheap thrill. The ' Antler Room ' was going to be a permanent installation for sure, if nothing else. 'I'm Will Graham. '

'Are you an agent or something? I haven 't seen you around here before, ' Abigail said and Will wondered why she was still talking to him. Movement caught his eyes then and he looked down at her hands. Originally, they were probably meant to just be resting on her lap, but her anxiety had her fidgety and her hands were twisting and tangling with each other.

'Not exactly, ' Will said, and then seeing her look of confusion, he decided to add, 'I teach at the academy. '

Her expression shifted again, turning more calculating, 'what exactly do you teach? '

She was smart, he would give her that, but in a way that came off as defensive, as though constantly on alert for any dangers that may be lurking around her. Given her background, it didn't surprise him.

'I teach psychoanalysis, which basically means that I try and teach people how to understand the motives of others, ' Will said, grateful that Abigail 's concentration now seemed centred on her right thumb nail, as it meant that he was free to make his own analysis of his fingers. He was trying to determine if the crease on his left index finger had gotten a fraction larger. He was pretty sure it had, but he couldn't be certain.

'That was developed by Freud wasn't it? I heard it was fairly criticised, ' Abigail said, causing Will to jolt.

'Yes it is. You 're interested in psychology? ' Will said, curious, if not a little suspicious as to why Abigail would just have that knowledge.

'Yeah. It might seem a little silly now, but I was actually hoping to join the FBI one day. I want to protect people, you know? ' Abigail said, only now coming out of the monotone she had been in until that point. Clearly she had strong feelings on the subject.

'Yes, I do know, but what did you mean by, ' was hoping ', have you changed your mind? ' Will said, finding himself becoming more engaged with the young woman the more he spoke to her.

'Well, I can hardly do it now can I? I mean, with my dad and now my mum killing my dad and... ' Abigail broke off suddenly, as though choked and Will looked up in time to see tears begin to glisten in Abigail 's eyes. This was the first time she said it out loud. Will had seen it a number of times, but it never ceased to amaze him how powerful a person 's own words could be. You could hear someone say something a hundred times, but it is never as real as the moment you finally do. This didn't mean Will had any idea on how to deal with a suddenly crying alpha teenager. Clearly all the talk about instinctive omega nurturing skills was a load of crap, not that Will didn't know that already, and he found himself patting Abigail 's back awkwardly as her tears turned to heaving sobs for the life and the lives that she had lost.

'Mu-um called me... after she did it... I-I think... she didn't really say. Sh-e said she was sorry. She said she couldn't let him hu-urt me... ' Abigail said and Will nodded, not sure about what to say. Her mother had told Abigail to stay at the house of her friend Marissa Shurr the night she murdered her husband, clearly to ensure Abigail was not implicated by the death.

'I love you, baby. '

Will 's head snapped up and he looked at Abigail. Her face was contorted in a strange expression, caught up in her memory. Evidently she had been parroting the last words her mother had said to her on the phone. It didn't make it any less unsettling to hear.

He would dream about those words.

About the girl who was powerless to stop her life from spiralling out of control and he had no idea his life was about to do the same.

Delivery

When Will finally entered Crawford's office it was with no small amount of trepidation. He had heard stories about Jack Crawford, an alpha who had quite the reputation for being difficult to work for, but too brilliant not to try anyway. He turned away dozens of eager candidates longing to work for the behavioural science division of the FBI, but he had an eye for talent and he had one of the best closing records the division had ever seen. It didn't stop the whispers, though they would have come about anyway, if only due to his unusual marriage to alpha, Phyllis 'Bella' Crawford. *It is unnatural*, they say. *Alphas are meant to be with omegas, it's just a fact of biology, isn't it? I mean, if God wanted just any couple to be together then heats wouldn't exist, would they?* Most of the time Will tried to ignore it and the rest of the time, well, he was glad to be going home to his dogs.

'Will Graham, take a seat,' Crawford said, cutting into Will's quiet perusal of Crawford's office. Clearly this wasn't likely to be a long conversation.

'Down to business then, what did you call me here for?' Will said, sitting down and from his scowl, Crawford wasn't impressed by Will's tone, but he allowed it to pass that time without comment.

'The girl, in the waiting room, what did you make of her?'

'Abigail? Is that what this is about?' Will said, trying to keep the incredulity from his voice.

'Yes, and no. I have something I want to share with you, but I need to find out more about you before I do and to do that I want to know your thoughts on Miss Hobbs,' Crawford said and Will had to bite back the retort that itched at the back of his throat. Crawford was clearly so used to people wanting in on anything he was working on, that he took it for granted that people would audition for him at the drop of a hat. Will was starting to feel a little curious, however, so he decided to humour him.

'I would say she is devastated, however, I also believe that she is defensive, likely as an ingrained survival skill. She has probably felt herself to be in danger for a long time...'

'So you're saying that she knew her father was a threat to her. That she knew what her father was doing to those girls?' Crawford said, and Will felt irritated at the interruption, as well as the barrage of assumptions that followed.

'Threats don't always have to be obvious. Clearly, yes, she could have known, but I don't have enough information about her home life to make that call. Now, if I had known that I was expected to be able to say for certain if I believe Abigail knew her father to be a killer, I would have asked different questions.'

'Listen here. I invited you to talk as a favour to Miss Alana Bloom, who assured me that you have the highest qualifications and that your insight may prove useful, but if you continue to use that tone on me then I will have no choice but to ask someone else. Do I make myself clear?' Crawford said, and Will fought the instinctive urge to quiver. Clearly Crawford wasn't

very use to dealing with omegas and Will had half a mind to tell Crawford where to stick his offer, but Alana's name caught his attention, like Crawford probably knew it would.

'I apologise. What I mean to say is that I would need to talk to her more in order to determine the source of her insecurity. She is rather intelligent though, and she has an interest in psychology. Apparently she also has a desire to join the FBI due to a desire to help people. If she did know about what her father was doing, or was involved, it was likely only in a periphery sense. Ignorance is bliss and all that,' Will said, looking up at the white board where only a few photos remained, one of each of the Hobbs and one of Marissa Shurr.

'What are your thoughts on the father? Why do you think he was killing those girls?' Crawford said and Will's eyes flickered to the detective, before returning to the post-mortem photo of Mr Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

'I would need to see the file,' Will said, not really wanting to look, but knowing it was pointless not to ask. Crawford seemed to think about that for a moment, before reaching into his draw and pulling out a thick folder and handing it over.

'Are the photos in there?' Will said, taking the folder and looking up only to see Crawford nod. Closing his eyes, Will tried to centre himself, before pulling the folder close and opening it.

The first thing Will did was take out the photos and place them on the desk. There was about fifty in all. Some were crime scene photos; photos of victims from family members. There were no post-mortem photos, since no bodies, or even parts of bodies, were found, at least until the police were given directed search instructions by Louise Hobbs. Apparently Crawford didn't feel it necessary to include photos of pillows stuffed with human hair, though Freddie Lounds had quite a bit of fun splashing photos across her column.

'I don't know if there is really all that much I can tell you that you wouldn't have worked out yourself,' Will said, flicking through the photos and trying to put them into a coherent narrative. 'Garrett was a male omega and we tend to have a difficult time impregnating female alphas. Though it is possible, Abigail would have been something of a miracle child. He should have felt an even stronger urge to protect her, but something happened that corrupted that, or skewed it somehow. As though she should have come from his body, rather than Louise's and that caused him to become conflicted about how he perceives her. On one hand, he loved his daughter; too much even. On the other, he wanted her to be a part of him, no matter what form that took.'

'What are you saying Will,' Crawford said urgently and Will distantly wondered if maybe Crawford hadn't seen this after all.

'He wanted to eat her, Jack,' Will said, spelling it out for him. 'But he couldn't bring himself to do it. He loved her too much. That's why he took those girls. Substitutes.'

Crawford's head was bowed when Will looked up. 'Will, I think that there is something...'

A knock on the door interrupted Jack and he stood up to answer the door. From his seated position, Will could see it was a young man, dressed in the uniform of some delivery service

or another, with a black cap on his head and glasses. Probably a beta. The young man handed Jack something to sign, before passing him the package and departing again.

‘I should probably see what this is,’ Jack said, by way of apology, since the box was marked ***URGENT*** in bold red letters across the box. Will just nodded and sat back. It was for this reason that when Crawford opened the box, Will wasn’t showered in confetti which sprayed up like blood from a severed artery. That turned out to be a rather an apt description, since the source of the confetti appeared to be a human heart, which lay, slightly mangled in the box, and now partially coated in confetti shaped like the symbolic heart, which were in different shades of pink and red.

‘Will, could you ask my secretary to contact Katz, Price and Zeller immediately and tell him to remind me to schedule you another appointment,’ Jack said his anger evident and barely contained. Will had no problems following those directions though and darted to the door quickly; only able to properly breathe again once he was standing outside the building.

Exception

It was five days before Will was called back to the office, which was hardly surprising considering what had happened the last time, but it did have Will curious as to what exactly that ‘present’ was about. He suspected it had something to do with why Jack had called him to their first meeting, though he couldn’t be sure. Will had considered asking Alana about the favour she had requested, but had decided it could probably wait a while longer. He got the feeling that he probably didn’t want to know, even if he was about to find.

This resulted in four relatively boring, but also relatively normal days, before he got a call from Jack’s secretary, Frankie, telling him his appointment was at 4 o’clock. Fortunately, this would still enable Will to attend his class for the day, maybe even grab a cup of coffee afterwards, but that didn’t mean it didn’t rankle him to know that Crawford was already expecting him to jump at a moment’s notice. It would probably be one of those things he would have to get used to if he was going to be dealing with Jack for any length of time.

When he got to the office, there was no one else in the waiting room and after alerting the secretary to his presence, he sat down to wait. It didn’t take as long as last time before Jack let him in, though Will figured it probably had something to do with the fact that he wasn’t expected to carry out an interview this time. Following Jack into the office, he could smell someone else’s presence in the air. It was rich and dark, like expensive coffee, with the headiness of fine wine and Will knew he was dealing with an unmated alpha. By comparison, Jack’s scent caused Will’s nose to itch, as Bella’s claim warded off any potential admirers.

It wasn’t difficult to spot the alpha and, for once the scent seemed to suit the man who held it. He was tall, probably about an inch taller that Will, with neat, ash blonde hair and wore a well-cut suit. His features suggested a European background and Will was interested in finding out why exactly Jack had saw fit to invite the stranger to sit in on their meeting. Will wasn’t the only one looking, and the other man’s thoughtful expression made Will a tad wary.

‘Will Graham, I would like to introduce you to Doctor Hannibal Lecter. Doctor Lecter owns a small psychiatric practice in Baltimore; though I heard you were also the one to train Miss Alana Bloom,’ Jack said, turning his attention to the Doctor.

'I was indeed, though I learnt as much from her as she did from me. I was very fortunate to have such a brilliant pupil,’ Doctor Lecter said, bowing his head in acknowledgement. Turning to face Will, the doctor stretched his hand out towards Will’s own. ‘It is a pleasure to finally meet you, I have heard much about you from Alana and I look forward to getting to know you better.’ ‘

It’s nice to meet you too,’ Will said, hoping his smile didn’t seem more like a grimace. Fighting the urge to reject the proffered hand, Will took it and tried not to seem too hasty when he ended the contact.

‘Now that we are all acquainted, let’s get down to business,’ Jack said, as he sat down at his desk and retrieved a file. Taking the seat across from Jack, Will tried to ignore the eyes that

were still on him and hoped that he wouldn't be soon regretting the acquaintance. 'Will, I have convinced the higher ups to make you an exception, you see, recently we have come across a serial killer, or possibly killers, unlike any that I have ever heard of outside comic books and I need your help to catch them.'

'Why did you need to have an exception made? I mean I have worked homicide before, you know I have,' Will said, not really sure if he was insulted or flattered.

'And look at how well you handled that. Omegas may be able to handle light duty police work, but none of you have ever made it through the FBI level screening procedures and you know it,' Jack said and Will wondered if this was really worth having to deal with Jack on a regular basis.

'And how did you convince them to make this exception?' Will said, trying to keep his voice even.

'This is where Doctor Lecter comes in,' Jack said, motioning to the silent alpha. 'They have agreed to allow us to make an exception for you, as long as we have a psychiatrist around to see to your mental health. Doctor Lecter has graciously accepted to fulfil that role for us.'

'And you really thought that an alpha would be the best choice for that?' Will said and out of the corner of his eye he saw Hannibal stiffen. Reviewing the words he used, Will grimaced. 'I do not mean to infer that you are not an extremely competent psychiatrist, Doctor Lecter, only that there is documented evidence showing that omegas do much better in therapy when their psychiatrist is another omega.'

'In this case, however, that would be a bit like the blind leading the blind now wouldn't it?' Jack said, but fortunately Hannibal had relaxed again, so Will was able to ignore Jack's words.

'Will is correct, however, if your main issue is with feelings of tension, then perhaps further association might enable us to avoid that obstacle,' Hannibal said and Will got the feeling that he wasn't the only one ignoring Jack's input.

'What are you saying, Doctor?' Will said, guessing that he probably wouldn't like whatever it was, but knowing that if he refused, then Jack would probably strong-arm him into it anyway.

'I was planning on inviting Alana over for dinner this Sunday and I am hoping you might consider joining us. As you are already acquainted with Alana, she might aid us in getting to know each other, so that you will feel more comfortable associating with me on a one-on-one basis,' Hannibal said and Will knew it wasn't an unreasonable request. He didn't like it, but then, he had never really done well associating with anybody and he wasn't really sure that Hannibal would be an exception.

'You're a lucky man, Will, I joined Hannibal for dinner the night before last and he is an unbelievably excellent cook,' Jack said, with a nod to Hannibal.

Pasting on a smile, Will said, 'I would be honoured.'

Hannibal returned the smile, though more genuine and he reached into his pocket to pull out a neatly pressed envelope, with Will's name written on it with perfect calligraphy. 'I was hoping that would be the response and here is your invitation. Though Jack has given me your number, I prefer a more personal touch when it comes to these matters.'

'Thank you,' Will said accepting the envelope. The paper was heavy and probably quite expensive and he had to wonder what he was getting himself into by being here. Clearly Hannibal was a man of some means, sophisticated and probably had quite the reputation in certain circles. He is perfectionist who enjoys control, possibly even thrives on it and as such he clearly dislikes displays of uncontrolled behaviour in others, particularly rudeness... It took Will a moment to realise he had drifted off into thought. It wasn't uncommon. His... thing, never really shut itself off and he would find himself coming to conclusions about others without meaning to. Turning to Jack, he said, 'so when do I get started?'

'Well, Beverly Katz should be waiting outside right now. She will take you downstairs and show you what we have so far, while I finish up with Doctor Lecter,' Jack said and feeling like a dismissed school boy, Will stood up and left the room.

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'I hope you can understand my little deception there, Doctor Lecter,' Jack said, a moment after the door had closed behind Will. 'The brass is breathing down my neck on this one, but if we are to stand any chance of catching this one, we need him; but he can't know that. We need him to think he has no choice in the matter, or...' Jack stood up and walked over to the window. 'We have managed to make it seem like the crimes are unrelated, but he has already reached a death toll of about 50 people... that we know about. Whoever it is, they are smart, ruthless and absolutely insane. Two long time officers have already resigned and a third was found in his bedroom this morning. Suicide. To be honest, I don't know if what we are doing is going to be enough. It will have to be. When this news finally breaks, and it will, we will need to be able show them the perpetrator or not be too far off.'

'We will catch them, Jack. Do not doubt that,' Hannibal said, placing a hand on Jack's shoulder. 'And Will is going to be fine. You have placed him in good hands, let me take care of him now.'

'Thank you Doctor, I hope you are right.'

Terrible

Meeting Beverly Katz was... interesting, to say the least. She was sharp, energetic and had more curiosity than was probably healthy, given her profession. Will knew right then they would get along quite well and he was pretty sure she did too. He had been rather surprised when the first thing she had said to him was to ask if he was the one to write the standard monograph on *Time of Death by Insect Activity*. When he admitted to it, he was forced to remind her three times to show him the crime scene evidence, before she would stop questioning him about the various methods he had used to gather and catalogue the data he received to write the monograph.

'Just so you know Jimmy Price and Bryan Zeller, the two guys I work with, won't be around when we get downstairs,' Beverly said, as she pressed the lift to go down to the morgue.

'Oh?'

'Yeah, they left to have lunch and then when they get back they will be briefing a couple of specialists who will be transferring over to help us,' Beverly said and Will found himself looking at her more closely. On one eyelid, her hand had shaken, messing up the eyeliner a couple of times. She had attempted to fix it, but had given up. Mascara was completely absent from the other and foundation barely concealed the bruising beneath her eyes.

'Things are that bad?' Will said, feeling dread in the pit of his stomach. Jack was, from his observation, a very proud man and one that would only accept the best from anyone who worked for him. If he was calling in for outside help, then the situation had to be a desperate one, the only question was, how come no one else seemed to know about it.

'You could say that,' Beverly said, taking out her card to open the doors into the morgue. 'I have heard the specialists are a bombs expert and a forensic chemist.'

'Okay, I need you to start from the beginning and tell me everything you know about who we are looking for,' Will said and Beverly nodded, heading over to a desk to grab a stack of files lying there.

'Well, to be honest, we have no idea,' Beverly said, putting the files down in front of him and sweeping her hair out of her face with a flick of her hand. Her manner had completely changed from the one he had witnessed upstairs, her mind becoming focused to the task at hand. 'Did you hear about the raids recently? The first was a hit on the bank, stealing close to three hundred million dollars. The second was a pharmaceutical supply company, stealing at least half-a-dozen pallets of drugs and finally a Home Hardware and Gardening store was hit.'

'Any casualties?' Will said, trying to hold off making assumptions with so little data.

'That's the strange part. A couple of people tried to play hero at the bank, but apart from them, there was no casualties at those crime scenes. No, that part comes after,' Beverly said

and pulled out the third folder and placed it on the table in front of Will. ‘I hope you have a strong stomach. I mean, I’m used to looking at this stuff and even I felt a little green.’

Will ignored her.

Opening the first folder he pulled out the pictures and laid them in front of him. After his eyes had comprehended what he was seeing, he forced himself to keep looking. Pulling the analysis of the scene to him, he read it over. Soundlessly, he accepted the second and the third folder. More and more bodies flashed before his eyes, young and old and without care to race, sexual orientation or gender identity, they were only chosen on the basis of convenience. Soon fifty different bodies were laid before him.

‘They’re experimenting. That’s their current stage. They probably started on animals and worked their way up. They are training themselves to cause as much death as possible in as short a time as they can make it and testing difference depending on age and size. They have an agenda, as I think you are well aware, but we haven’t seen it yet. We will soon. If we don’t catch them before they start, and I doubt we will, a lot more are going to die, possibly even hundreds. What we do know is that they have a base of operations, maybe even a few which are relatively local. That doesn’t necessarily mean they will be isolated, though some could be, but they will have to be places where people don’t look or listen too closely,’ Will said, his eyes drifting open to look at the photos again. ‘While I can’t pinpoint exactly what their goal is, I can tell you this: they aren’t motivated by greed; they won’t be bought and they won’t stop. They have been preparing too long to end it now. Finally, although it may not seem like it, these deaths are a means to an end. This person, or even people, aren’t killers by nature, but something broke them. Whatever they need to do, they think that killing is the only way they are going to get it done.’

‘Okay,’ Beverly said, nodding, putting up a calm front... that didn’t last long and she swore. ‘This is not okay. This is terrible. I mean, first the Ripper, then Hobbs and now this?’ The way her eyes kept drifting to the photos made Will sure that she wanted nothing more than to burn them or at the very least shove them onto the floor.

‘I was wondering; have you got the report on the heart that Jack received?’ Will said and it took a moment before recognition dawned on Beverly’s face.

‘Oh, right, I can’t believe I forgot that,’ Beverly said and raced over to a different desk to pick up another file. ‘That one was really weird. Wait, are you thinking these are connected?’

‘Aren’t you?’ Will said, thinking it was a little bit obvious.

‘It was possible, but there was no way we could be certain. We don’t exactly have any behaviour models to work off at the moment,’ Beverly said, a bit defensively and Will opened the folder. ‘When we had the heart scanned, we found there was a note left inside. I think a scan of it is on the third page. The heart itself is from one of the people they kidnapped, a worker from the hardware store.’

Flipping to the page, Will read the note:

‘ I welcome you to my wonderful game,

All you police officers may come and play,

A special invite will be delivered soon,

While all lonely hearts look up at the moon. '

And read it again. There was just something odd about the wording.

'They're trying too hard,' Will said putting the note down. 'They want attention. They want to make this seem like this big elaborate game, like in comics or movies, where the good guys are forced to play against the bad guys in order to win the day. They aren't deluded as to what they are doing. They want us to see them as the villain.'

'Why would they want that? I mean, the villains usually lose, don't they?' Beverly said, looking at the note. 'I mean, in comics and movies, their grand plans usually fail and they get caught. Are they thinking they even thinking will succeed?'

'I don't know. Maybe they haven't gotten into the role that far,' Will said, the words 'lonely hearts' drawing his eyes repeatedly. 'What I do know is that they usually give hints about their plans to the heroes indirectly. Are there any groups in the area that are called Lonely Hearts?'

'I will have a look,' Beverly said, and sat down in front of the nearest computer and typed it in. 'Huh, we've got a few hits. A couple are online groups, a store based and we have a dating franchise.'

'Does the dating service have any services in the area?' Will said, moving to stand behind her shoulder.

'One is in Friendship Heights and the other is in Mayfair,' Beverly said, clicking into the main website. 'I see where you are going now. I'm guessing you want me to look up any events that will involve stargazing?'

'Today's Valentine's Day isn't it?' Will said, his eyes darting to the calendar.

'Yeah it is. So you're thinking it will be tonight?' Beverly said, clicking on a heart framed button titled '***Events***'. 'Wait, this sounds promising. Each Valentine's Day they hold a moonlight picnic in a nearby park. The Friendship Heights event is at Rock Creek Park and Mayfair's is at Anacostia Park.'

'I guess we will just have to check both of them and hope we get lucky,' Will said and Beverly picked up the phone.

'Jack, we think we've found something,' Beverly said, her eyes falling on the small clock on the laptop. '***SHIT!*** Forget that, Jack, it's an emergency. We are pretty sure whoever it is, is going to attack tonight. As in right now. Will noticed something in the poem. Lonely Hearts is a dating service and they are holding moonlight picnics at Rock Creek Park and Anacostia Park. The picnics started over an hour ago.'

Will looked at the analysis again while he waited. The paper and ink were fairly standard issue and there was no DNA evidence found at any of the crime scenes. The confetti was home made as well, which was much help. ‘What are you after?’ He murmured, and a moment later Beverly grabbed his arm.

‘We have to go, we’re heading to the Rock Creek Park location and Jack said to tell you Hannibal will meet us there,’ Beverly said, moving away and taking off her lab to exchange for a field coat. ‘My gear's in the car, let’s go.’

Try Again

To say the scene was a blood bath when they arrived would have been a gross simplification. It was a slaughter, but clearly not a very experienced one, as several slices were too deep, filling the air with a rancid stink that made a few of the new officers throw up whatever they had left in their stomachs. Unfortunately, in their haste, the detectives had to make do with whoever was at hand and so very few were used to dealing with dead bodies, let alone the smell. To Hannibal's credit, he merely crinkled his nose, his professionalism overriding his disgust, meanwhile Beverly was giving the same look to the barfing officers, muttering something about '*newbies*'.

Jack was on the way and the crime scene was secured for the moment. Realistically, Will could wait until Jack arrived to do his 'thing', but he wanted to get it over and done with, so heading over to Beverly, he asked her if he could have her clear the crime scene for a few minutes.

'Do you want Doctor Lecter to stay? I mean, I heard that he was here to help you,' Beverly said, but Will shook his head, he wasn't ready for Hannibal to see that yet. 'Okay everyone, clear the crime scene and get yourselves cleaned up. You have five minutes.'

As the last of the officers cleared away, Will walked the scene, taking in all angles, before moving closer to get a better look. At the centre was a long table, with benches on either side to act as chairs. The originally white table cloth was stained red-brown by the drying blood of the dead who were sitting at the table, all in various poses. Each person looked almost as though they were in the middle of their meal, only, the plate before them wasn't filled with the sandwiches and cakes which lay scattered on the floor, but their own organs, which had been pulled out to puddle on their plates. That wasn't the cause of death, which had been poison and Will could only wonder at how many people had worked on this scene. Clearly it was the work of more than one or even two, which was rather unusual for this type of crime. Finally, in the centre of the table lay the last body, his insides were removed and replaced with flowers taken from the vases that had been on the table. On the man's chest was written two words.

Chesapeake Ripper.

***

The pendulum swung back and forth in Will's mind.

Slowly, the scene reversed itself until everyone was sitting at a beautiful, candlelit table, rather than the gruesome tableau it had become.

We are here and yet not seen. We pass around the tables, placing drinks in front of our unsuspecting victims. We have choreographed this moment perfectly and they will die before they even realise what we have done. The co-ordinator stands up to call a toast, preaching hope and good fortune to the lonely before her. She does not realise she has signed their death warrant. Each of them takes a drink.

Within moments their bodies begin the swift decent towards death, and now it is time for us to act. We take out our materials and begin to position the bodies. They are too weak to fight against us and this process will take too long to wait for them to be dead. A few of them try to escape while we are distracted with the other ' s, but it does not take long to catch them; though most of them are corpses by the time we do. Meanwhile our leader focuses all their attention on our centrepiece. He is the reason why we kill and he is the reason for our display, but ***who*** *he is, is not as important as* ***what*** *he is. He is merely the paper on which we write our invitation.*

This is our design.

Stepping back, Will rubbed at his eyes, before taking his glasses out of his pocket and putting them on. The fact the man was a clear stand in for the Ripper was both alarming and thrilling. For some reason the creator or creators of this tableau had made a connection with the Chesapeake Ripper and it was not a positive one. In fact, he was more than likely the reason they had taken up killing in the first place.

The thrilling part was that they, at least they believed they, knew who the Ripper was.

***

All too soon the five minutes were up and the officers swarmed once more, searching for evidence, taking photos and preparing transport for the removal of bodies. Hannibal had yet to say anything to Will and was instead a rather calming presence by his side. With the man so close, Will found that by focusing, he could almost block out the scent of the bodies nearby. It couldn't bock out the sound and Will could hear a few forensic technicians arguing about the best way to transport the bodies.

'Will, if I had suspected that the killer would strike so soon, I would have moved our meeting closer, so we were better prepare. I apologise,' Hannibal said and Will nodded, not exactly sure of what the correct answer was to that. At best, whatever he said would be rude and he really didn't want to get on the bad side of his new psychiatrist. Fortunately, it was about that time that Jack finally arrived and after being briefed by Beverly, he made a beeline straight over to Will.

'Beverly told me you have already had a look at the crime scene, what have you found?' Jack said and Will could see the strain and frustration on Jack's face. The worst part was they both knew this was only the beginning.

‘From what I have gathered, this is the special invitation they spoke about in that message,’ Will said and Jack nodded.

‘The Chesapeake Ripper,’ Jack said, ‘do you think he had something do with this?’

‘This? No,’ Will said and gave a dry laugh. ‘No, he would find this all excessive and completely amateur, like a child’s finger painting. Besides, why send an invitation to someone who is already at the table?’

‘What do you think they want with the Ripper, apart from getting his attention?’ Jack said, and Will followed Jack over to have a closer look.

‘Evidently, they want him dead, Jack,’ Will said, wanting to block off his nose from the assault. The stench had only gotten worse with more time and they were only fortunate that there wasn’t daylight to make it worse. ‘I think, they think they have a good idea who the Ripper is and whoever is the stand-in will give us a clue as to who they think it is. They are sending a message to the Ripper, that he is alone and that he loves no one. That he is going to be caught because of what he does, but not by us, by them.’

‘And the references to cannibalism, what is that about?’ Jack said and Will swallowed, trying to work out how best to say it.

‘Jack, I think they have worked out why the Ripper took all those trophies and it wasn’t to keep them...’ Will said, before glancing back at the scene. ‘...From what else I can tell, the coordinator probably called for a toast of some kind. It would be the only way to ensure that everyone drank the poison at the same time and ensure no one realised the issue until it was too late. So the killer had to have access to the food and drink supply, meaning it was probably the caterers. I doubt they were the actual caterers for the company they hired, so we probably won’t find anything more from the catering company, other than a group of dead caterers, but maybe they would be lucky and they would find some video footage at the potential crime scene.’

‘I’ll look into it,’ Jack said and nodded once, before turning on his heel and stalking away.

‘Hey Will,’ Beverly said, causing Will to jump. ‘If you want, I can get an officer to drive you back to headquarters. I mean, they are mostly just getting in the way now and we are just arranging for transport of the bodies now anyway.’

‘If Will is amenable, I would be glad to offer my services to him,’ Hannibal said and Will had to bite back his immediate urge to turn it down. ‘Besides, it will give us an opportunity to talk through what has happened tonight.’

‘Oh, well that sounds like an excellent idea,’ Beverly said and she got a strange tone to her voice that Will didn’t like. He also didn’t like the fact he had no real and reasonable excuse not to accept.

‘I don’t want to put you out,’ Will said, knowing it was pointless.

‘Nonsense, I wouldn’t have offered if it were,’ Hannibal said and Will turned to Beverly to say goodbye, just in time to see her hiding a grin.

‘I guess I will probably be seeing you soon,’ Will said, knowing that Beverly probably had a long night to look forward to, since he could tell she would want to get started right away. ‘Make sure to get some sleep. It will still be there in the morning and we don’t need you making mistakes.’

‘Speak for yourself Graham, besides, sleep is for the weak,’ Beverly said, though she gave him a small smile.

‘I am ready to go when you are,’ Will said, turning back to Hannibal.

‘Follow me,’ Hannibal said, gesturing the direction of travel.

Passion

When they arrived at Hannibal's car, Will realised it was a Bentley; because of course it was. It shouldn't have surprised him then that Hannibal was also a 'gentile alpha' who acted as though omegas couldn't even open their own doors. Will didn't say anything though and just slid into the car with as much grace as he could manage. Then they were alone together, in a car. A really expensive car that probably cost more money than Will earned in a year. While Will didn't particularly care for those things, the small space made it impossible not to be aware of Hannibal's presence, if only by scent. In a dazed thought, Will wondered if Hannibal would taste half as good as he smelled. He certainly had the looks to add to it.

Shaking his head in a futile attempt to clear it, Will said, 'so, is this going to be a short therapy session or something?'

'No, I don't believe you are quite ready for that, though I would appreciate if you would agree to a session on Monday,' Hannibal said, and Will nodded, looking out the window at the snowy landscape and finding her preferred it to the landscape now locked in his mind.

'So, if we aren't going to talk about that, then what do you want to talk about?' Will said, feeling both relieved and curious by the answer.

'I can smell that you have dogs, at least three of them. We could talk about them, if you would like,' Hannibal said and Will felt a flush creep up his neck. Here was Hannibal, smelling absolutely decadent; meanwhile he smelled like cheap aftershave and dogs. He wouldn't be surprised if he also smelled a bit like rotting corpses on top of that, even if he had kept a reasonable distance.

'I have six: Buster, Cherry, Willow, Toffee, Maggie and Joe,' Will said, smiling a little now as he thought of them. He had spent hours training each one and all of them had been worth the effort. People usually found that keeping six dogs was a bit strange, however, so he wasn't entirely certain how Hannibal would take it.

'I take it you did not buy them from a store?' Hannibal said, rather than question the number, like people normally did.

'No, they are all former strays,' Will said, looking over at Hannibal, whose expression gave nothing away. 'Usually they are just out wandering, abandoned. I... I just can't bring myself to leave them. At first, I would try and re-home them, but then I found myself keeping one or two that I couldn't find homes for and gradually I just stopped.'

'You feel very passionate about your dogs,' Hannibal said, sounding a little bit admiring, though Will had a hard time believing it was genuine. 'Animal cruelty is the lowest form of savagery, equalled only by abuse of children and infants. The world needs more people like you to balance out that savagery.'

'Thanks, I guess,' Will said, not really sure what to say, but feeling he had to say something. 'You know, you're the first person who hasn't flat out told me I'm strange or weird. I mean,

they're not wrong, it is a lot of dogs, but...'

'Will, are you able to take care of all of your dogs and give them the attention they need?' Hannibal said. Will could see where Hannibal was going with that train of thought though, and was finally able to give a genuine smile.

'Thank you. You get so used to hearing something and it gets hard not to believe it,' Will said, returning his gaze to looking out the window. For a while there was silence between them and quick glances at Hannibal showed he was deep in thought. In fact, it wasn't until they were driving into the car park that Hannibal spoke again.

'Will, I am hesitant to say this, as I recognise this is a sensitive subject for you and it is quite understandable why that would be the case,' Hannibal said and Will could already feel his barriers rising at such an introduction. 'Your perspective on the world is a unique one and despite what you may think, quite beautiful.' Will couldn't help the scoff at that, though he held his tongue. Barely. 'You could go anywhere and naturalise, even thrive, but I believe that you are afraid of losing who you are in the process.'

'Wouldn't you?' Will said, unable to hold back any longer. Hannibal had no idea what it was like holding the ghosts of so many people's thoughts emotions. Sometimes, when was distracted, he found himself mimicking the body language and speech patterns of the people he was talking to. Every time he took a new person into his head, he lost a little bit more of himself and one day he would look in the mirror and all that would be left is a Frankenstein monster, composed of the rotting remains of every person he has forced himself to become.

Hannibal pulled the car into an empty space then and turned off the engine. Turning now to face Will, who braced himself, Hannibal said, 'while the process you use is somewhat different than others in some ways, you are simply experiencing life, in a way that is not confined simply to your own point of view; and are we not shaped by our experiences?'

'But these aren't my experiences,' Will said, feeling frustrated and... scared.

'They do not need to be, nor are you morally responsible for them in anyway, but I am hoping that with my assistance, you might begin to feel at peace with who you are. A person is not a solid object and some change faster than others and for different reasons. It is not going to be easy, you are too used to thinking of it as something to be fearful of, rather than embraced,' Hannibal said and Will had enough. Unbuckling his seatbelt, he flashed Hannibal a strained smile and thanked him for the ride. Fortunately, Hannibal seemed to understand he had pushed too hard and merely reminded Will of their dinner plans the next night.

Hurrying out of the car out of the car, Will was fumbling for his car keys long before he was close to his car. In the darkness of early morning, Will could feel his teeth chatter, but it gave a nice distraction from the thoughts that were swirling around in his head. Hannibal's words were like a swarm of wasps in his head, continuously buzzing and stinging until Will wished he had something to drown them out.

Notice

Fortunately, Jack had let Will be left alone for the remainder of his weekend. This allowed Will a chance to catch up on the sleep he missed out on and play with his dogs. At 12 o'clock Sunday afternoon, he guiltily remembered a stack of papers that had been handed in the week before and so that took up the next four hours until it was time to get ready to head over to Hannibal's house. Alana had called the day before, after hearing he was invited, to see if he wanted her to drive her there, but Will had refused, finding it somehow easier to turn Alana down than he had Hannibal. He guessed that it probably had something to do with Alana's physical absence, though he couldn't be sure.

Part of him, a rather large part of him, if he were to be honest, was nervous about seeing Hannibal again so soon, but, another more childish part, almost felt like this was a chaperoned date or something, which was ridiculous. Hannibal was his psychiatrist for God's sake and even if he weren't, he would not be interested in a 39-year-old, emotionally damaged omega, who smelled like Old Spice and dog. It was about the time Will was considering washing his neck and not bothering with aftershave at all, that he realised what he was thinking and resolutely grabbed his things and walked out the door.

On the drive to the house, Will considered pulling over a few times to pick something up to bring along, as his father had taught him, but he had no idea what would be appropriate, given the situation. He also had no idea what types of things Hannibal liked, other than lavish and if he tried he probably would end up making a mess of things. It did, however, prevent him from thinking about Hannibal's advice for a bit longer. The idea that he could just let go of who he was and let himself... *become*, was a terrifying one, considering his line of work. In fact, it was only that Jack expected Will to work with the man that he was going at all... Well, mostly.

When he arrived, he could see that Alana had arrived before him. Checking the time, to make sure he wasn't late: he wasn't and got out of the car to head to the door. The house was three stories, above ground at least, and was brick and gothic and everything Will would have imagined Hannibal's house to be. It felt like a different world. Taking a deep breath to steady himself, Will knocked on the door...

...And Alana answered it. While he knew from her car that Alana had arrived, it was somehow off-putting to see her like this. She looked lovely, but she always looked lovely, like Snow White brought to life. He just hadn't expected her to be the one to answer Hannibal's door, or to be wearing an apron over her bright red cocktail dress.

'Will, you made it,' Alana said, her voice high and happy. In her other hand she held a glass of beer and she used it to gesture him inside. 'Hannibal and I have just been putting the finishing touches on dinner. You're going to love it.'

'I hope I'm not intruding,' Will said, starting to feel like he had been invited along on someone else's date. Like Hannibal, Alana was an alpha, but she was attractive, intelligent, sophisticated and loving. Will really didn't know why he hadn't seen it sooner.

Alana's smile faltered at that his comment. 'No, of course you're not intruding. Why would you think that?' Alana said and Will just raised an eyebrow. They were interrupted then by the arrival of Hannibal, who had probably left his own apron in the kitchen. He was wearing a black suit, which was of course, impeccable. His hair was neatly gelled in place, with a small curl where his fringe was swept to the side.

'Good evening Will,' Hannibal said, coming to stand behind Alana, transforming them into the perfect couple. 'I am glad to see you managed to find my home, though I hope it wasn't with any difficulty?'

'No, it was fine,' Will said, avoiding Hannibal's eyes. He had forgotten his glasses at home, which was annoying since he ended up being more conspicuous in avoiding peoples gaze.

'Please, come through, dinner will be served shortly,' Hannibal said, leading Will through to the dining room. The room was darkly elegant and Will could tell that Hannibal had probably entertained many guests in this room. The horns above the mantel piece were an interesting touch, though all that Will could think of was death as he looked at them. In between them was a painting, which Will immediately recognised as ***Leda and the Swan***. While a famous piece, he wouldn't have considered it particularly appropriate to feature it in a dining room and he wondered if this spoke of a quirky sense of humour on Hannibal's part.

It was only then that Will realised that Hannibal and Alana had left the room at some point and he was entirely on his own. Suddenly he felt awkward, just standing around in someone else's home. Someone he had only really just met and knew little about. He thought about sitting down, but then realised he would probably feel even stranger that way and remained standing. Fortunately, just as he was about to start pacing, Hannibal returned with the three meals balanced carefully.

'I apologise, I have not offered you a drink,' Hannibal said, placing the plates on the table. 'Do you have a preference?'

'Beer would be fine,' Will said remembering Alana's drink.

'You're not giving away my private reserve are you?' Alana said, her voice teasing as she entered the room.

'Actually, I will just have water,' Will amended quickly. 'I have a bit of a head ache anyway.'

'As you wish,' Hannibal said, sending Alana a chiding look as he passed her, but she seemed unrepentant.

'So Will, Hannibal said he will be helping you while you work on cases. How are you coping so far?' Alana said, sitting down at the table to the right of where, Will presumed, Hannibal would be sitting and so he took the seat to the left, directly across from Alana.

'To be honest, I don't think that anyone is coping well right now,' Will said, hoping she would drop it.

‘I have also heard talk that this has something to do with the Ripper,’ Alana said and Will grimaced.

‘Yes, Beverly told me that was becoming the worst kept secret,’ Will said, thanking Hannibal, who had returned with his glass of water. Turning his attention to the restaurant quality dish before him, Will said, ‘So, Hannibal, what is this?’

‘This is foie gras au torchon with vidal sauce and figs,’ Hannibal said sounding quite pleased Will had asked.

‘Foie gras,’ Will said, the name sounding familiar somehow. ‘Isn’t that duck liver?’

‘Indeed it is, though it can also be goose liver,’ Hannibal said and Will frowned. ‘Is there something the matter, Will?’

‘It’s nothing,’ Will said, but he found himself avoiding the meat anyway. It seemed that Hannibal was rather a hypocrite, when it came to food at least.

‘Hannibal, this is delicious,’ Alana said, a low moan in her voice.

‘I thank you. So, I believed you and Will were discussing the case before I interrupted,’ Hannibal said, though Will wished he had chosen a different topic.

‘Yes, Will was just telling us about the connection it has to the Ripper,’ Alana said, her eyes turning to Will, as though prompting him to speak. Will did not. Instead he paused for a moment, taking a bite of fig as he considered his options. On one hand, he could request to speak about a different topic, it was dinner after all and talk of cannibalism was hardly appropriate conversation. On the other hand, avoidance in front of Hannibal could make him appear like he wasn't able to handle himself and he could advise Jack not to involve Will any further. It didn't help that it was already Jack’s stance on the situation, just on the basis that Will was an omega. So really, he only had the one option.

‘It is my belief that the people involved believe they have some knowledge of the Ripper’s true identity and seek to use that knowledge to draw him out,’ Will said. Taking a long drink of water, he cursed the fact that he had turned down something stronger, though it would hardly be appropriate to be any less than sober.

‘What did Jack say?’ Alana said, looking concerned and Will wondered if it was for him

‘He wasn't happy about it, which is understandable,’ Will said, not sure what answer Alana was after. ‘He wanted to make sure the Ripper wasn't actually involved in the murders.’

‘And was he?’ Alana said.

‘Of course not,’ Will said and then realised he may have put a tad too much emphasis on the denial. ‘I mean, we know he is somewhat of a narcissist, but he is hardly going to start signing his name on his work, like some twisted form of graffiti tagging.’

‘You are aware of what happened the last time Jack went after the Ripper,’ Alana said quietly, as though it was possible for Will not to know about Miriam Lass. She had been the first and

only omega to be accepted into the FBI training program, but unfortunately she had disappeared while doing work for Jack. It was commonly believed the Ripper was responsible for her disappearance, and presumed murder, though they had yet to find any part of to confirm that suspicion. For the next month after her disappearance, the newspapers had screamed variations of ***'Omega Goes Missing'***or ***'Brought Into the Bureau To Soon?'***, as though it was because she was an omega that got her caught, rather than because she was still only a trainee. In any case, the number of omegas who applied to the FBI had dropped sharply with her loss.

'Of course I am aware, but I am not helping Jack catch the Ripper, am I? I am trying to find the people who, for some reason, have a grudge against the Ripper,' Will said, wondering if he would have to deal with others asking similar questions.

'Once these people are caught, however, how would the Ripper know that these people wouldn't simply be given deals in payment for information? Jack can be quite unreasonable when it comes to the Ripper,' Hannibal said, speaking up for the first time in a while and Will had to take a moment to consider the question.

'Well, if they are caught before they kill again, I have no doubt that Jack will attempt to gain as much information on the Ripper as possible,' Will said, 'However, the public has been kept in the dark, for the moment, but that will change soon and then once he catches them, he will have no choice but to punish them to the full extent of the law, even if that costs him all his bargaining chips.'

'Then, the Ripper will likely become involved soon, or risk discovery and he will be likely hunting the very prey you are after,' Hannibal said, his expression becoming thoughtful. 'I am surprised Freddie Lounds has been so quiet on the matter.'

'Yeah, I heard that Jack has talked to some people and the have somehow detained her or something, as a matter of national security or something, I didn't really ask too many questions,' Will said and he noticed Hannibal's eyebrows raise.

'That's a bit extreme, isn't it?' Alana said, and Will could see her point. While neither of them were particularly fond of the omega, the idea that Jack had the power to imprison her in order to keep her quiet was a rather daunting one and it made Will wonder what else Jack could do if pushed. He was prevented from having to answer when his phone buzzed in his pocket.

'Excuse me for a moment, I should probably get this,' Will said, annoyed that he forgot to turn his phone off before sitting down for dinner, it wasn't like he didn't have time.

'Of course,' Hannibal said graciously and Will gave an embarrassed smile. 'I shall prepare desert for when you return.'

Treat

‘This is Will Graham,’ Will said.

‘Hi, Will, this is... this is Abigail,’ said the soft voice. It was shaking and Will knew it was because she didn’t know how she would be received. ‘You said I could call if I ever needed to talk?’

‘Of course,’ Will said, his eyes no longer taking in his surroundings, rather, he was seeing the lost young woman who had her whole life torn away in one night. ‘Is there something you wanted to talk about?’

‘Not really, I mean, not on the phone,’ Abigail said and in a rush added, ‘would you come and visit me tomorrow?’

‘Am I allowed?’ Will said, not really sure what the standard procedure was in these situations.

‘You could ask Alana, Alana Bloom. She’s my psychiatrist and I am sure she would let you if you asked her,’ Abigail said and Will had to wonder how he suddenly had someone so desperately hopeful of having his company. ‘Do you want me to give you her number? She gave it to me when I asked her last time she was here.’

‘No,’ Will said, a little ruefully, ‘I am actually having dinner with her right now.’

‘Wow, really?’ Abigail said and it was a bit of a relief to hear her voice change to something that wasn’t completely miserable.

‘Yeah, just hold on a moment and I will ask her,’ Will said and putting the call on hold, he returned to the dining room, to see Hannibal had returned and Alana was laughing at something he had said. She cut off once she heard the door, though her eyes still sparkled merrily. ‘Alana, may I speak to you for a moment. It has to do with one of your patients.’

Alana’s face smoothed out in an instant, before concern took hold, ‘of course Will.’

Leading her back to where he had been before, Will said, ‘I didn’t mean to alarm you, but I am on the phone to Abigail Hobbs, she said you treat her?’

‘Abigail? Why on Earth?’ Alana said, her face screwing up in confusion. ‘Is she okay? Did something happen?’

‘No, I don’t think so, but she wanted me to ask if I could visit her tomorrow, and I wasn’t sure if that was allowed,’ Will said, feeling rather awkward.

‘Oh, well, can I ask, how do you know Abigail?’ Alana said and Will was grateful then that Abigail couldn’t hear what he was saying.

‘You’re not going to like this, but when Jack invited to his office for the first time, to discuss the crimes that had been occurring, he had Abigail waiting in the waiting room,’ Will said and he could practically feel Alana’s eyes narrowing. ‘We ended up talking and it was only later that I found out he was testing me to find out if I could work up a profile of her from that conversation.’ He looked down at the phone in his hands, the timer steadily counting up. ‘Since I wasn’t aware at the time, I gave her my number in case she wanted to talk.’

‘Let me speak to her and I will give you my answer when I return,’ Alana said, sounded annoyed and frustrated.

Taking the call off hold, Will said, ‘hey, Abigail, Alana wants to have a talk to you. Is it alright if I put her on?’

‘Oh, okay Will,’ Abigail said and Will handed Alana the phone, before returning to Hannibal.

‘Is Alana to be returning?’ Hannibal said, as Will retook his seat in front of a rather rich looking desert.

‘Yes, though she probably won’t be happy with me,’ Will said, figuring that he might as well tell his psychiatrist what had happened. ‘I met one of her patients recently and they have asked if I would I would visit them at the care facility.’

‘Would the patient be Abigail Hobbs, by any chance?’ Hannibal said and Will looked up in surprise. ‘Alana has been rather worried about her mental wellbeing and Good Jack has not been helping matters.’

‘I didn’t imagine he would,’ Will said, not really wanting to imagine what Jack had been up to.

‘Still, if she has reached out to you, then maybe you may be able to help her,’ Hannibal said, before gesturing to the desert. ‘Please eat, I would hate for it to melt.’

While there was little chance of that fear being realised, Will picked up a spoon and dipped it into the chocolate sauce, picking up pieces of fruit and cream along with it. Placing the treat into his mouth, Will could instantly taste the brandy whipped in with the cream and could barely restrain himself from making embarrassing sounds of pleasure at the taste.

‘Where on Earth did you learn to cook like this?’ Will said in amazement.

‘I was raised with my aunt and uncle in France, where I was taught to cook by their head chef,’ Hannibal said, bowing his head in acceptance of the praise. ‘I was not always quite so good as I am now, and many a time the chef removed me from the kitchen out of despair that I would ruin another carefully prepared meal.’ Will laughed politely, though it was difficult to believe that Hannibal could do anything that was any less than perfect. “I gradually got the hang of it, though I have always loved it. There is something incredibly satisfying about providing food to people.’

‘My dad...’ Will started, but then stopped once Alana had returned and she handed Will the phone.

‘I will phone the facility in the morning to let them know you are coming,’ Alana said, as she took her seat, not looking at Will. ‘Abigail was very happy to hear you were coming and while I would prefer she speak to a professional, she needs some happiness right now.’

‘Thank you,’ Will said, putting his phone away.

That turned out to be one of the last things Will said for the night, as Alana turned to Hannibal and said, ‘hey Hannibal, do you remember when...’ and that was it. For the rest of the night Will again felt like the intruder on a date, as Hannibal and Alana swapped various stories about their time working together. Some of the stories were rather amusing and Will caught himself laughing a few times as he got to know the other players in the stories, but by the time it got to 9 o’clock he was starting to miss his dogs and so made his excuses and left.

Remain

Although the return trip hadn't been an entirely pleasant one, both Will and his dogs were pleased when he finally made it back. As it was a cold night, he even let them remain on his bed, well, a few of the small ones at least, as he slept. It didn't stop the nightmares, though he might have been able to go back to sleep a bit faster knowing they were there watching over him.

This lasted until 5 in the morning, when he suddenly remembered his impending visit with Abigail and his mind rejected any thought of further sleep. It didn't help that the small headache he had gone to bed with had somehow flared up over night and he had dry swallowed a couple of aspirin before he had even made it out of bed. This is how come 7 AM saw him on his hands and knees as he scrubbed the grime of the bathroom floor, when a knock sounded at his door. This was surprising, as he hadn't heard a car and his dogs had waited till that moment to warn him of the intruder on the property. Frowning, he put down the scrubbing brush, glad that he had gotten dressed for the day at least, as he went to answer it.

'Good morning Will.'

'Uh, good morning Alana,' Will said, guessing at the reason she was there from the apologetic look on her face. 'Please, come in. Do you want a drink? Coffee? Tea?'

'Water, thank you,' Alana said and Will headed into the kitchen to grab a glass and a mug from the cabinet. Alana may not have needed the caffeine, but he was starting to feel he was in need of some.

'You know, if you wanted to tell me that I can't visit Abigail, you could have just called,' Will said as he handed her the water, but instead of confirmation, he was met with a startled look.

'Not at all, of course you visit Abigail,' Alana said, though her expression turned sheepish. 'I came here to apologise for last night. I was childish and rude, and I'm sorry. It's just...' She heaved out a sigh, looking down at her hands. 'He was my mentor and I really like him, have for a long time, but I don't know if it was just never the right moment or if there was never a right moment. Then he meets you and suddenly... did you know that you were basically all he would talk about before you got there?' Will shook his head in surprise. 'Wanted to know if I knew about your family, about what foods you liked, were you seeing anyone, were you considering seeing anyone...' Will could feel himself blush. 'He said it was only because you were to be his patient, but he could have just asked you.'

'I'm sure it doesn't mean anything,' Will said, trying to get his mind not to go there. It was hard not to, though, when an attractive, intelligent alpha was apparently interested in you. 'Besides, as you said, he is my psychiatrist. Nothing can happen.'

'Would you want it to?' Alana said quietly. 'I don't know. I mean, I barely know him and he will be trying to get into my head and you know how much I enjoy people doing that,' Will

said, though he guessed Alana was probably hoping for a definitive no, but that was the best he could do.

‘Okay,’ Alana said, and reached into her bag, pulling out a piece of paper. ‘Here is the address and phone number for the Port Haven Psychiatric facility in Baltimore. They will be able to direct you from there.’

‘Thanks,’ Will said, accepting the piece of paper and within two minutes that was all that remained of her visit.

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When Will arrived at the facility and signed in, he couldn’t help but feel like everyone was staring at him. He knew it was probably his paranoia talking, along with his lack of comprehension as to what he was even doing there. It wasn’t like he was family, friends of the family or even involved in the case, he was just a guy who happened to sit down and talk to her for five minutes while waiting to talk to someone. He’d felt sorry for her though, he still did and he guessed that was good enough.

It didn’t take long to find Abigail’s room and when he did he saw she was sitting up on her bed, reading a book, though he couldn’t tell what it was. Not sure what was proper courtesy in these types of situations he knocked and waited for her to look up.

'Will, you're really here. I was worried you were going to change your mind and not come after all,' Abigail said smiling as she put the book aside. 'Come in.'

'It's good to see you Abigail,' Will said, entering the room and taking a seat by the bed.

'I guess you're wondering why I asked you to come and the truth is, I'm not really sure,' Abigail said. 'I just have this feeling that if anyone could understand what I have been going through, it's you.'

'How are they treating you?' Will said.

'I hate it here,' Abigail said and forced herself out of bed in a burst of energy. 'All the other girls here talk in little baby voices and the others; they either treat me like I'm broken or like I'm a monster.'

'Hang in there. I'm sure it won't be much longer and you will be out and able to start your life again,' Will said, but rather than cheering her up, her face fell.

'That's just it. As bad as it is, I don't know anything about living on my own,' Abigail said sounding panicked. 'I have no money and everyone knows who I am, who my father was. What he did to all those girls. I have already received a dozen rejection letters from different colleges and half of them I haven't even applied to yet.'

'Hey, it's okay. Sure it's going to be a bit rough for a while, but don't you have any friends or family who would be willing to take you in for a while?' Will said and Abigail shook her head, tears beginning to well up in her eyes. 'What happened?'

'Mum was an only child and I never knew her parents, but dad's family... they don't want anything to do with me. They think that I was the one killing th-the girls, not dad and... Meanwhile everyone at school thinks I killed them too. Only Marissa has been standing by me, but her mum won't let her anywhere near me,' Abigail said and Will really couldn't stand seeing her look so upset and found himself moving to hold her tightly without any real conscious thought.

'I know it's not much, Abigail, I will be here for as long as you need me to be,' Will said, pulling back to look at her. 'But for now, why don't you tell me a bit about Marissa? What do you two like to get up to together?'

'Well, she's a beta, like her mum. I think that was part of the reason dad didn't take her. The other girls were alphas, like me,' Abigail said, her voice becoming stronger now they had shifted to a safer topic. 'She absolutely hates yoghurt, can't even stand watching other people eat it. She has ever since she found out that they make it using bacteria; which actually does kind of sound a bit gross, especially the names of the bacteria, like streptococcus thermophilius. It sounds like a disease or something.'

'It does a little bit,' Will said with a laugh at Abigail's expression, which had turned mildly disgusted. 'She really doesn't like traitors though, hates them,' Abigail said, sounding like she agreed with her friend on this topic. 'I think it was because her dad walked out on her. Apparently he found an omega to hook up with and not even a daughter was enough for him to want to stick around. He sends her cash on the holidays and her birthdays, but she just donates it to some charity or another. Doesn't want his money.'

'How does she get along with her mum?' Will said and Abigail shrugged, her eyes becoming distant.

'Okay, I guess, or at least they used to. They aren't anymore... because of me. Because Marissa wants to help me get through this, but her mum's scared,' Abigail said, the pain returning to her voice. 'And I get it. I do, but I just want my best friend back. I don't know how I am going to do this without her.'

'I'm sure her mum will come around, but you will just need to give her a bit more time,' Will said, sitting beside Abigail and finding the strength to hold her eyes somehow.

'So, you wanted to know a bit of what we got up to?' Abigail said, sniffling, before breaking the eye contact to think. 'Well, when we were thirteen, we were at a summer camp together and there was this group of really mean girls, not just alphas, but betas and even an omega. Marissa said they were only there because not even their parents wanted to put up with them. Anyway, they were teasing this one omega girl named Bethany, short, a bit chubby, wore glasses and her face was basically just one large freckle. The worst part was, she was the younger sister of one of those mean girls. Well, Marissa couldn't just let that slide so we...'

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For the next hour or so Abigail just talked about her friend and Will could see why she had been drawn to both Marissa and the FBI. It was also somehow different listening to Abigail talk about her life than it had been listening to Alana and Hannibal. With them Will had felt like an intruder, but with Abigail he felt like he was being let in on these big secrets and he genuinely enjoyed listening to the mischief she had gotten up to.

'Will,' Abigail said as she was being called away for her afternoon therapy session. 'You'll come back and visit me, won't you?'

'Sure will. I have to if I want to find out how you managed to get stuck singing Christmas carols to the elderly at Easter,' Will said smiling and Abigail grinned back, all traces of tears faded. 'Also, Abigail, if you want, when you are able to, maybe you could come and visit my house and meet my dogs.'

'You have dogs? As in plural? How many?' Abigail said, almost sounding as though it was the best thing she had ever heard.

'I have six: Buster, Maggie, Cherry, Willow, Joe and Toffee,' Will said, enjoying the wide-eyed expression Abigail had. '

Okay, you totally have to let me meet your dogs,' Abigail said, sounding a bit reverent. 'I think you might have just become the coolest person I know.'

'Well hopefully you won't change your mind when you meet them,' Will said. 'Just remember, call me if you need me and I will talk to the staff about visiting again soon. I might even bring some of my psychology books if you want. Some of them are a bit old, but...'

'I would love that,' Abigail said jumping up. 'I better get going though, they get cranky when I'm late.'

'See you soon Abigail,' Will said and with a wave, she was gone.

Helping Hand

Leaving Abigail's room, Will had to stop and take a couple of aspirin, when he was suddenly struck by a familiar scent and unconsciously drew in a deep breath as he turned to face Hannibal, who was rising from his seat beside the door.

'Doctor Lecter, what are you doing here?' Will said and was surprised to see Hannibal's expression turn faintly embarrassed.

'Originally, when I heard you were coming here, I thought I would attend to lend a helping hand if you needed one. I had heard from Alana that Abigail could be quite troublesome, however I soon saw that my assistance was unnecessary,' Hannibal said with a small smile. 'I must therefore fall back on my other excuse for why I am here which was to invite you to have dinner with me. As you are already in Baltimore, it could even be tonight if you so wish it, though I will not be quite as prepared as I would be otherwise.'

'You don't have to try and impress me Doctor Lecter,' Will said, now feeling rather embarrassed himself. 'I am rather underwhelming myself.'

'Then we have a difference of opinion on this point,' Hannibal said, his smile growing, 'as I believe I have already informed you, from what I have seen, your mind is a marvel and I look forward to getting to know you further. So, will you join me for dinner?'

'I guess my dogs can wait a bit longer,' Will said, unable to hold back a smile of his own.

' Excellent, though I feel I must ask, as you did not seem to particularly fond of the meal I made last time, do you have any preference?' Hannibal said and Will flushed slightly.

'I apologise if I came off as rude, however, when I learned what foie gras is, I also learned how the livers are fattened. I haven't wanted to eat it ever since,' Will said as they began walking towards the car park.

'Ah, I had wondered, though I had not wished to bring it up in case it put Alana off her meal,' Hannibal said, which caused Will to wonder why Hannibal would serve it if he suspected his guests would have moral objections to it. Like it was some sort of strange inside joke that only Hannibal was in on.

'I hope you don't mind, I promised Abigail I would ask about when I can visit again, as well as find out when she is able to leave the facility for short periods. She really wants to meet my dogs,' Will said as they neared the front desk.

'Of course, do you wish for me to wait for you?' Hannibal said, but Will shook his head.

'I don't know how long I will be,' Will said.

'Don't take too long,' Hannibal said with a teasing note of warning in his voice. Turning on his heel, Hannibal left and Will headed over to the counter.

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By the time Will had spoken to the lady at the desk, waited around for ten minutes while she got in touch with Abigail's onsite therapist, who then had to get in touch with Alana, it took at least three-quarters of an hour before Will was able to leave to head over to Hannibal's. It was for this reason that he spent the ten minute drive rehearsing various apologies he could make once he arrived there.

He had called after the first twenty minutes to warn Hannibal he would be late and if he should still come over, but Hannibal hadn't seemed too bothered and actually seemed a bit glad that he would have more time to prepare. When Will knocked on the door, he half expected Alana to be the one to open it, despite knowing it would just be Hannibal he would be dining with. Taking a glance down at himself, while he waited, he let out a wince. Jeans and a flannelette shirt were hardly appropriate dining attire, but there was nothing to be done about that.

When Hannibal opened the door, it appeared he had made that effort, as his hair had been combed and aftershave reapplied, though he was in the same suit from earlier. 'Will, please come in.'

'I'm sorry I'm so late. It seemed that everyone needed to speak to everyone else and a few of those people were busy,' Will said. 'On the bright side, I will be visiting Abigail on Wednesday and, depending on how her therapy session with Alana goes, she might be able to visit my dogs as soon as Saturday.'

'That is good news indeed,' Hannibal said and he did sound genuinely happy for him, though, as Hannibal was leading him to the kitchen, he couldn't see his face. Once they arrived, Hannibal flitted over to the oven to turn back the temperature. Task complete, he faced Will and said, 'Would I be a terrible imposition if I were to join you on Saturday?'

Giving a short laugh, Will said, 'well that saved me the trouble of having to ask, I guess. Alana seemed to think it best if I weren't alone when Abigail visits. She assures me it's not personal... I think she's worried Abigail is using me.'

'Not an unreasonable concern, given the circumstances,' Hannibal said, and Will found himself fighting his tells by drawing a deep breath.

'I'm not saying that I believe Abigail would never manipulate me, I mean, spend enough time with someone and I think everyone will try and manipulate you at some point, but I think that Abigail has spent too much time feeling powerless to know the strength she has, let alone consciously attempt to use it.'

'It may be as you say. Still, your attachment to her has made me curious and I would like to meet her,' Hannibal said and Will could tell that he did not believe Will's opinion but did not wish to fight about it.

'I guess I can't screw up too badly if you're around, can I?' Will said dryly and Hannibal gave a small smile.

'I do not believe you will 'screw up', as you say, at all,' Hannibal said, clearly not used to using such language. 'After all, you handled her very well earlier.'

'Thanks,' Will said, feeling a bit embarrassed by the praise. 'I'll let you know when I find out and hopefully we can arrange a time.'

'Onto a different topic, have you heard the news about Leonie Jenkins?' Hannibal said and Will started, not really expecting this turn of conversation. He had in fact, heard of Miss Jenkins, but as no one talked about it, it was sometimes hard to believe it was even happening.

'Of course I have heard, I mean, the first omega to run for presidency of America,' Will said, trying not to sound like he had read every biography on her that was currently available.

'Indeed, I don't think anyone had expected the election campaign to run this quietly,' Hannibal said, producing two plates from the cupboard and some cutlery from the draw beside it. 'I am concerned, as there is probably something in the works that will disrupt that.'

'I think there is a protest being held next Friday by members of the church and a few conservative groups,' Will said, though he had also found it rather strange.

'There you have it,' Hannibal said, putting on some oven mitts and opening the oven to remove a reasonably large pot. 'I cannot say I am not disappointed. Miss Jenkins appears to be rather intelligent, well-spoken and generous with both her time and money. She would likely make an excellent president.'

'Well, they haven't held the election yet, so she could still win it,' Will said, remembering himself just in time to prevent himself from leaning on the counter, 'though I am still surprised the constitutional challenge failed.'

'I think we all were,' Hannibal said, 'though it has been interesting to watch how Australia has dealt with their first omega Prime Minister, especially considering she has chosen not to marry, despite being bonded.'

'And to a beta, I bet a fair few people didn't like that,' Will said, watching as Hannibal began to plate the vegetables from the pot, which gleamed from the sauce. If Will had been the one to serve, he probably would have half coated the bench, let alone the plates he was placing them on, but Hannibal didn't allow a drop to fall where he did not intend it too and Will could have admitted that he had never seen vegetables look half as appetising before.

'No, I suppose they wouldn't,' Hannibal said. 'Now I hope you don't mind, but I have found an excellent merlot that pairs wonderfully with this meal.'

'Uh, sure,' Will said, guessing that Hannibal probably knew more about it than he did. 'And how would you like your steak?' Hannibal said and Will noticed for the first time, the plate of steaks which had been next to the frying pan, which was resting on the stove top.

'Uh, medium rare,' Will said and Hannibal smiled, making wonder if Hannibal had been testing him or something. 'So, I have heard that it's not that likely Sarah West will be in office in Australia much longer. Apparently there has been a lot of infighting, causing people to lose confidence.'

'It is a shame,' Hannibal said, easily managing to keep up while not burning the steaks, a feat which Will looked on with jealousy, as he was barely capable of doing either of those independently, let alone both simultaneously. 'No matter, hopefully we will soon have our first omegan President, though time will tell whether or not we shall be more successful. Now, if you would carry the cutlery out into the dining room, I will be in with the drinks and food shortly.'

'Sure,' Will said, walking around to grab them, though he had been momentarily tempted to lean over the table. 'Where do you want to sit?'

'Our seating arrangement from yesterday will be fine,' Hannibal said and Will left to do as he was bid.

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'So Will, tell me a bit about Abigail Hobbs,' Hannibal said, after Will thanked him for the food, which tasted just as good as it smelled. 'I have only heard bits and pieces from news articles, hardly a good source for forming an opinion on anyone.' Will paused, before forcing himself to chew and swallow, though the food still seemed stick in his throat after he did, so he chased that with a mouthful of wine. Hannibal had been right, it was good wine.

'What do you want me to tell you?' Will said, placing the glass down. 'I mean, it's not like we have really been talking about the crimes her father committed. We were mostly talking about Marissa Schurr.'

'Do you suspect that Abigail may have romantic notions towards Miss Schurr?' Hannibal said and Will blinked, feeling a bit stupid.

'I actually hadn't really thought about it,' Will said. 'I mean, it's possible. I wouldn't rule it out, but I will just have to wait and see. Abigail isn't too happy with Marissa's mother though.'

' And why is that?' Hannibal said and Will found himself suddenly noticing the graceful and precise way Hannibal was cutting his food, before it made its journey to his mouth.

'Uh,' Will started, before remembering what he was about to say. 'Apparently Marissa has been prevented from spending time with Abigail, since her mother believes Abigail could pose a threat to Marissa.'

'And you do not,' Hannibal said, thankfully not mentioning Will's lapse, even if he did seem a tad amused.

'If you had heard the way Abigail talked about Marissa, you wouldn't believe it either,' Will said, his mind's eye seeing the way Abigail laughed as she told him about water balloons filled with ketchup.

'Have you ever considered having children of your own?' Hannibal said, jolting Will out of his imagining.

'Wha- me?' Will said, pointing to himself as if to clarify.

'Indeed. I believe you would be an excellent mother... or father,' Hannibal said, and Will took a drink in a vain attempt to shield his red face.

'I would be lying if I said I had never thought about it,' Will said, when he was able to manage words. 'But look at me...'

'Who else would I be looking at?' Hannibal said and, well, Will just wasn't use to that kind of talk.

'Uh... Anyway, I haven't heard from Jack since I saw him at the crime scene,' Will said, inwardly wincing at the very obvious change of subject.

'Were you expecting you would have?' Hannibal said and Will paused to think.

'I don't know. I guess,' Will said finally. 'I mean, he put all that effort into recruiting me, but then I don't hear from him.' Realising he was getting anxious, Will let out a long slow breath. 'I mean, I understand that processing evidence takes time, but isn't there anything I could be doing?'

'Speaking about work, I allowed you to have a pass on your session today because of Abigail, but I think we need to arrange a session,' Hannibal said, causing Will to wince. 'Are you free at 6 o'clock on Tuesday evenings?'

' Yes, I think so,' Will said, thinking it was a bit of an odd time for a session.

'Excellent,' Hannibal said, standing to take their now empty plates. 'If you wish, you may dine with me after.'

Unable to ask now, Will said, 'Hannibal, I'm sorry, but are you courting me?'

'Yes.'

'Isn't there rules against that?' Will said, mind reeling at the blunt answer.

' Indeed there are rules that prohibit relationships between doctors and their patients, however, as my duty to you is on an unofficial basis only, I believe we are free to define our relationship as we so choose,' Hannibal said, sounding so completely reasonable.

'Can I think about it?' Will said, hoping he didn't sound too freaked out.

'Of course,' Hannibal said, looking and sounding so poised and unaffected that Will almost wondered if he actually felt anything at all. 'Take as much time as you need. I do not wish for you to regret any time we have spent together. Just remember, I am here for you anytime you need me.'

'Thank you,' Will said quietly, his eyes fixed ahead of him, barely able to look at Hannibal, let alone meet his eyes.

'If you will excuse me a moment, I shall return with dessert,' Hannibal said and left the room.

Tide

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the short chapter. The next one will be longer. I promise.

Will was in a boat. He couldn't see it, but he could feel it rocking beneath him. Side to side, as comforting as being rocked in the arms of the mother he couldn't remember. Slowly, he opened his eyes, expecting to see the lake he liked to fish at when he felt like being on the water, rather than in it. This was not the sight that greeted him, and instead of seeing the lakes shore, there was only water for miles around. Above him, the sky rumbled with thunder, though it remained the clearest of blues.

'Don't you just love days like this,' Michelle Cooper said, sitting across from him in the boat. She was dressed in a blue dress that reminded him of Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz and she held a matching parasol which was edged in fluffy white lace.

'Days like what?' Will said, finding a matching yellow parasol next to his hand. Putting the fishing rod in the holder, he picked it up and opened it, being careful to point it away from Michelle.

'The sky is angry, you know,' Michelle said, a wise expression on her face. 'The sky is full of blood and it will rain and rain.'

'But it's not even cloudy, how could it rain?' Will said, speaking louder over the sound of the thunder.

'It's not going to rain from the sky silly,' Michelle said, just as the boat bumped into something, causing it to rock harder than before. Turning his head to see what they had hit he was met by an ocean of dead bodies.

*'**I am in blood stepped in so far that should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er**,' said Hannibal, 'I am afraid this is only the beginning.'*

'The beginning of what?' Will said, but the ceiling above his bed was the only answer he was to receive.

Affront

Will didn't get much sleep after that and morning classes were fuelled mostly on caffeine and half a cheese sandwich. His dogs had been very playful that morning, a lot more than usual and he knew it was because he had been away so much lately. His class didn't seem to notice, though, since three of them were looking at the phones hidden under their desk, another two were gossiping about something and the rest were doing a combination of doodling or staring off into space. To be fair, he was discussing the best ways to format a report about behavioural analysis and that wasn't the most interesting of topics, but then he wasn't the one who had to submit a 5000 word assignment using that format, he only had to grade them and marking time would probably be a depressing time on both sides.

Finally, after ninety minutes had passed he was able to call an end to the class. Looking at the students, he couldn't tell if they were moving more or less quickly than usual, though he would have to wake Miguel in the back row. From what he had heard, Miguel's brother and son were involved in a recent store robbery and his brother had died shielding his three-year old from bullets. Unfortunately one bullet had passed through his body, striking his son, and although his son still lived, he was intensive care and would be for a few more days at least.

Pulling out the notes he had printed out from his case, he walked up the steps and shook Miguel's shoulder. For a long moment the young man remained still, before he let out a large yawn and his dark eyes opened. Will wasn't able to resist a grin when he watched the man all but jump out of his chair, his hand running through his short hair in a reflexive instinct to calm himself.

'Señor Graham, perdóname por haberme dormido. Después de lo que le pasó a mi hermano...' Miguel said in a rush and though Will knew a little bit of Spanish, he only understood one word in three.

'Calm down Miguel, I know about your brother and you are not in trouble, I just thought that you might want to wake up before the next class came in,' Will said, interrupting. 'I also thought you might want these.'

'Thank you, Mister Graham. My mother, she cries all the time, and after my father died, my brother was the alpha of the house and I am not so used to being the one that is relied on,' Miguel said. 'That is what happens when you are born beta. My brother was three years younger than me, but he was alpha. He was the strong one. My mother had such high hopes for him...'

'My father wished I was a beta, like him,' Will said, resting against the wall. 'He would always say that omegas were the carers and the alphas had the strength, but it was the betas upon whose backs civilisation was built, for they are steady and dependable. They will never stray and never falter.'

'You are more than your ability to bear children, though I appreciate the sentiment,' Miguel said, standing up and packing away his things. 'I just hope I will be strong enough to carry

the burden.'

Feeling his phone vibrate in his pocket, Will bid farewell to Miguel and headed outside to answer it.

'Will, I need you to cancel your afternoon class, the Ripper's back,' Jack said and Will could feel a chill run down his back at the words.

'Jack, are you sure?' Will said, his hands already searching for his car keys.

'Yes, I'm positive, and we need you right here now,' Jack said, Will could tell Jack was at that moment staring at the fruit of the Ripper's destruction. 'We suspected we might get a response from the Ripper, though I don't think we expected one quite so soon.'

'Send me the address and I will be on my way,' Will said, grabbing his coat. He would have to call Hannibal to say he would be late, if he would be able to make it at all, though Jack might let him leave early if he knew it was for an appointment with Hannibal. He would also have to call Alana and ask if she could cover his class, but he could do that on the drive.

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The address was for a decrepit apartment building in one of the poorer areas of Baltimore. Signs of transient guests were littered everywhere and Will wondered why the Ripper had chosen there of all places to set up his latest piece. Ducking under the police line, he found Jack talking to one of the detectives, a beta female who was probably a bit older than Jack and Will could tell she had fought hard to get where she was. Will didn't have to wait long, as Jack excused himself the moment he spotted him.

'So, Jack, what have we got?' Will said, taking a pair of gloves from a box on the counter.

'Two bodies, one whole and one...in pieces. We were able to get victim ID on the first body, but we haven't yet located the fingers of the second,' Jack said. 'Victim one, was Dominic Jackson, twenty-four. He had a record for a number of charges, including pick pocketing and petty thefts. He served a short prison sentence a couple of years back.'

After a pause, Will said, 'have someone question his cell mate, or any of his friends or family and find out if Dominic ever spoke about anytime he failed at robbing someone.'

'You think he tried to rob the Ripper?' Jack said, but he seemed like he was considering the request.

'I think the Ripper would find that rude, don't you?' Will said and Jack nodded. 'I will get some officers on that, in the meantime, the crime scene is through that door. I had it cleared out when you arrived,' Jack said.

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Barely into the room and Will could already feel the difference between the two crime scenes. Whereas the killers in the previous crime scene had been drenched in blood due to a mixture of haste, inexperience and just the sheer number of victims, this was bloody in a way that was far more controlled and precise. Will could also see why Jack would have difficulty identifying the second victim, as it seemed as though the Ripper had feed them through a wood chipper, or something similar.

The first victim was staged in the centre of the room, sitting on the broken down couch. He was wearing a half mask which concealed the top half of his face. It seemed to be plastic and was probably only cost a few dollars, but looking closer, Will could see there was hollows where the eye balls would have been, but had been very carefully removed. These were the only things the Ripper had removed, as the man's chest had been opened and all the organs above the intestines had been removed. In their place were pictures of the organs, probably downloaded from the internet, which were placed in their anatomically correct places.

Once he was sure he had seen everything, Will stepped back and closed his eyes.

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'Hey Will, are you looking for Jack?' Beverly said, once he left the room, looking, if possible, even more tired than she had the last time. He nodded, his senses still felt raw after what he had just experienced, but he knew better than to keep Jack waiting.

'Do you know where I can find him? I had better get this over with,' Will said, fetching his bottle of aspirin and shaking out a couple onto his palm. Beverly smiled sympathetically.

'Yeah, he just got a phone call and he headed outside to take it, so he will probably be a while,' Beverly said, before brightening. 'Hey, why don't you come and meet the guys? Don't pay any attention to Zeller though, he can be a bit of a jerk sometimes. Probably has something to do with him being a belpha.'

'Oh,' Will said. He hadn't really met an intersex belpha before, though he had met a bemega. Like male/female intersex, belpha, bemega and the incredibly rare, amega, all displayed biological traits of both sexes and to different extents; however, with the hormones produced by their not-quite heats and/or ruts, their hormones tended to be more unbalanced, which usually meant they were required to take hormone supplements to balance themselves out. There was talk about the possibility of a belphamega, but only a handful had ever been brought to attention.

'Yeah, he doesn't like to talk about it much, though with his scent, it is a bit hard not to notice,' Beverly said, her nose crinkling a little bit.

‘Well, I guess I will have to meet them at some point,’ Will said and Beverly grinned broadly and he could tell that the two were important to her.

‘That’s the spirit,’ Beverly said and all but took him by the hand to get him to follow her over to meet the two, who were waiting in the next room with coffee.

‘Hey guys, I thought you might like to meet Will,’ Beverly said as the got closer. ‘Will, this is Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller,’ she continued, indicating to the two men in turn, who almost looked as exhausted as Beverly and Will wondered how much pressure Jack had them under to find something that could lead them to the killers. This close to Zeller, however, Will was glad for the warning. It wasn’t that he smelled bad, but... his nose started to itch just smelling it. He knew it was something that he would get used to, but for the moment his senses were confused.

‘So you’re the omega Jack has been talking about,’ Brian said and Will could feel his eyes on him, like he was like some lab specimen.

‘Yes,’ Will said.

‘What Brian means to say is that it is nice to meet you and we look forward to working with you,’ Jimmy said, making Will wonder how often he was required to do that. If Brian made any non-verbal response, Will missed it, as he was too busy counting the cracks on the floor tiles.

‘So, Will, you’ve had a look through there, is there anything you want us to look out for?’ Beverly said and it was almost a relief to get back to the case at hand.

‘Not much,’ Will said, knowing that Jack wouldn’t be very happy to hear that. ‘You may find some organs missing, taken as trophies, though most of the organs removed from the body on the couch would have been put through, as well as his eyes.’

‘So what is it that you even do?’ Brian said, sounding annoyed and frustrated in a way that Will could understand.

‘I meant there was not much that is relevant to finding forensic evidence,’ Will said, annoyed anyway. ‘I will tell you more once Jack returns.’

‘Which is now,’ Jack said from behind him, causing him to jump. ‘Talk.’

‘Well, as you can probably guess, the Ripper isn’t very happy about these killers and what they are trying to do. He finds them lesser, wasteful and lack taste,’ Will said, wracking his brain for something that could point to who the Ripper was. ‘He knows he is smarter. He’s always known it and that probably has something to do with his surgical training. He knows what it is like to hold life in his hands and then choose whether or not to save it. These... people, they don’t seek to elevate the people they kill. It is a mockery.’

‘A mockery of what?’ Jack said.

‘When a serial killer kills it is because they feel a need to do it, to take life,’ Will said, trying to put himself back into that headspace. ‘But not them. It’s like they only think that's what they are supposed to be doing, like reading a script or an instruction manual, rather than because of any drive. He knows it’s only a matter of time before they get caught, but he won’t and it insults him they even think they can succeed.’ Rubbing his face, Will decided to try a different angle and said, ‘did you find out anything about how the killers managed to trick the hosts into thinking they were the caterers?’

‘Yes. It turns out the catering service likes to have their staff wear masks to fit in with the theme of the party. They aren’t there to socialise and the masks help them become part of the decorations, or at least that is what they say,’ Jack said and Will nodded.

‘Well that explains the mask,’ Will said. ‘This isn’t an elevation, Jack. He isn’t just turning those he thinks don’t deserve to breathe into something better. This is a review.’

‘Is he going to kill again?’ Jack said, finally asking the question that the others had been wanting to ask.

‘Yes.’

All I Ask

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the late update. I was sick for a couple of days, also I haven't been writing as much which is making me a little bit nervous about this catching up to where I have written up to. So I guess I will just have to do more writing. lol Thanks for the comments, since I really appreciate all the support. Enjoy.

'Will, good evening, please come in,' Hannibal said from the door way. Will, who had been examining the artwork in the lobby and had been to Hannibal's house, had expected that Hannibal wouldn't have the typically sterile office most people in the health profession seemed to have, but he hadn't expected this.

Looking at the walls lined with books, Will knew they weren't just for show. He wondered how many thousands of dollars Hannibal had spent acquiring such a collection; possibly even millions and Hannibal would have read every single one, probably even memorised a lot of them.

'You have a beautiful office, Hannibal,' Will said, wanting to fill the silence and knowing that Hannibal would appreciate the compliment.

‘One of the benefits of owning a private practice,’ Hannibal said, closing the door and walking over to one of the two opposing seats and sitting down. ‘I designed it with the intention of creating a comforting space for my patients. I was also aware that I would be spending much of my time here and so it would also have to be a place that I would wish to spend time in.’ Will half expected then for Hannibal to ask him to take a seat in the opposing chair, but Hannibal seemed content to watch him and Will found himself slowly exploring the room, grounding himself as he counted his steps. ‘So I have heard from our good Jack that you have had a rather interesting day.’

‘You could say that,’ Will said, fighting a grimace. ‘I don’t know if a small war has started, or an invasion, or something else, but these people, I don’t what to call them, but they have decided they want to destroy the Chesapeake Ripper and to do that, they want to make themselves worse than him. He is the standard for which serial killers can be compared against and they want to kick him off the throne...so to speak.’

‘And the Ripper’s response?’ Hannibal said and Will paused.

‘I think he is so used to being the smartest one in the room, that he isn't prepared for this and if I am right and they think they know who he is, they could lead us right to him,’ Will said.

‘I thought you said that you were not going to investigate the Ripper?’ Hannibal said, an odd note in his voice. Concern maybe?

‘I don’t think I have a choice,’ Will said and he honestly didn't think he did, even if he may wish it otherwise. ‘The Ripper has got himself involved now and two people are dead as a consequence of that. This doesn't feel like his normal sounder, though, or I would only be concerned about there being one more body to deal with.’

‘Sounder?’ Hannibal said and a quick glance saw that Hannibal had turned to track Will’s movements.

‘A sounder is, as you probably know, a term used for a group of pigs,’ Will said, feeling a bit like he was back in his classroom. ‘That’s how the Ripper views his victims. Not as people, not as prey, as pigs.’

‘And what do they do to cause him to perceive them as such?’ Hannibal said, standing up now that Will had made his way as far as the ladder.

‘Nothing overly significant; they were rude,’ Will said and looked up at the ladder. ‘May I?’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal said and Will climbed up the ladder to have a closer look at the books. ‘If you see anything you are interested in, feel free to borrow them.’

‘You really have read them all haven’t you,’ Will said, running his fingers over the covers. ‘How many of these have you got memorised?’ Hannibal didn't answer and Will didn't expect him to. ‘The Ripper enjoys control and he believes that those with the capabilities for self-control should use it. That’s how he chooses his victims and that’s why it is so difficult to trace him. He doesn't follow the typical patterns of a sociopath, or a psychopath, or anything else that people try and label him with.’

‘How do you see him?’ Hannibal said and Will walked over to the railing, looking out, but seeing nothing.

‘I see him as one of those pitiful things, sometimes born in hospitals. They feed it; keep it warm, but they don’t put it on the machines. They let it die, but he doesn’t die. He looks normal and nobody can tell what he is,’ Will said. ‘They are right about some things though. He was likely lonely and isolated as a child, probably has some history with poverty, but he’s not a drifter and he won’t have had any trouble with the law.’

‘You seem to have given him much thought,’ Hannibal said, moving closer to where Will stood on the balcony.

‘Well they have had me teach about him as part of the curriculum every year since I started teaching,’ Will said, feeling suddenly odd, though not able to explain why.

‘Will, I hope you do not find this presumptuous, but I must make a request,’ Hannibal said, his tone suddenly changing in a way that had Will’s complete attention, as Hannibal had not had the entire session. ‘If you ever get to a point, when dealing with the Ripper, where you feel you are, in anyway, in danger, all I ask is that you choose to be blind. Do not be brave.’

‘I don’t know if I can do that,’ Will said, confused by the request.

‘And that is why I had to ask,’ Hannibal said, causing Will to frown. ‘Because it is in your nature to value others more than yourself. You would sacrifice yourself in a heartbeat if it would allow someone else to survive.’

Feeling oddly touched, Will said, ‘thanks, I guess.’

‘Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little tea cup, only brought out for special guests,’ Hannibal said, watching as Will made his way back to the ladder to climb down.

‘And how do you see me?’ Will said. He never really liked hearing people’s opinions on him, but he knew this one would be different at least.

‘The mongoose that I want under my house as the snakes slither by,’ Hannibal said with an odd little smile. ‘Now, our session is over and I believe the only question that remains is, will you join me for dinner?’

Fire

This is how Will found himself at Hannibal's home for dinner for the third night it a row. If he were to be honest with himself, it wasn't as unpleasant a prospect as it could have been. Hannibal was not only an excellent cook, he was a wonderful conversationalist, as he was intelligent, patient and polite. Despite all this, Will felt wary and he couldn't understand why. It felt as though Hannibal, the true Hannibal was hidden beneath a mask, and his true self was only seen in the moments meant only for himself, such as with the foie gras.

'Will, may I take your jacket?' Hannibal said, hanging up his own on a hook next to the front door.

'Okay,' Will said, but before he could shrug it off, Hannibal was standing behind him, his hands sliding under the collar of his jacket and dragging it down. Will knew he should be doing something, but the sudden physical contact had him stiffening so much that he wouldn't have been able to, even if he had been able to think clearly.

'I fear I have made you uncomfortable. I would apologise, however, I fear I may be about to make you more so,' Hannibal said, turning to hang up the jacket, as Will worked up the strength to turn around and face him. 'Will, have you given any thought to the question posed to you yesterday?'

'Yes,' Will said, wishing he could lie, but knowing that saying he hadn't could amount to complete rejection.

'And have you come to an answer?' Hannibal said.

Will bit his lip. Despite all his hopes of miraculously having an answer once Hannibal asked again, that had clearly not happened and now he was standing there like an idiot trying to string two words together. It wasn't as though Hannibal didn't possess all the traits of an excellent bond mate, despite Will's reservations about him and the truth of the matter was, Will was lonely. He had been for a long time and the pain of it sat in his chest, causing a constant dull ache that flared up in his darkest moments until it was almost unbearable.

'You know, most people don't like me,' Will said, hoping his voice didn't sound too strangled.

'I am not most people,' Hannibal said, moving closer and causing Will to automatically step back.

'Boundaries might also be a bit of an issue,' Will said, feeling as though he was babbling. 'Even if you are treating me unofficially, for us to be courting on top of that, trying to determine where those are might be a problem.'

'I do not mean to cause offence, however, I would imagine that boundaries would be an issue for you in all your relationships,' Hannibal said not unkindly. 'I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.'

‘Please don’t psychoanalyse me. You won’t like me when I'm psychoanalysed,’ Will said quietly.

‘I cannot believe that,’ Hannibal said. ‘Even so, observing is what we do. I can’t shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off. Still, the question remains, will you give us a chance to discover our own boundaries? They may not be like those of other couples, however, we cannot expect them to be and also have a mutually satisfying relationship.’

Taking a deep breath, Will's eyes rose to meet Hannibal's and his breath hitched. He could tell straight away that Hannibal wasn't used to being unguarded with his emotions, as he was clearly trying to be. He could see Hannibal's doubts, his hopes, his fascination and curiosity, melded with attraction. He felt as though he was being given a glimpse into Hannibal's heart, one that was brave and passionate and intensely lonely.

'Okay,' Will said, before realising that even he had trouble hearing himself then. Clearing his throat, he repeated, 'okay.'

Hannibal didn't beam or blush or anything like that, but the worry fell away and happiness creased the corners of his eyes, which made him seem so much more handsome than Will had ever seen him. That gaze turned suddenly impish then, as Hannibal said, 'so tonight is now a celebration, and possibly a first date...?

'Fine,' Will said laughing, a little giddy now from the attention, as well as the fact he now, sort of, had a boyfriend.

'Excellent,' Hannibal said, leading them into the kitchen and fetching a bottle of wine from the fridge and a glass decanter. 'I hope you don't mind, I have made nothing more exciting than stew and fresh bread. I find it is something that is relatively simple, filling and keeps you warm.'

'Stew is fine,' Will said, glad that Hannibal had decided, once again, to make something relatively basic, even if it would likely taste far better than anything Will could hope to make. This was confirmed by Hannibal just lifting up the lid, as the air was suddenly filled with the heavy scent of meat and vegetables. Will just prayed that his body wouldn't do anything as embarrassing as making noises. His will power was further tested when Hannibal retrieved the loaf of bread he had in the bread maker. He never really had fresh bread like this before and he could hardly believe how good it smelled.

'I have prepared a Cabernet Sauvignon, to accompany our meal tonight,' Hannibal said. 'Now, if you could set the table I shall be in shortly with our food.' Hannibal indicated the cutlery he must have retrieved while Will wasn't paying attention.

'Sure,' Will said, taking them and guessing they would have the same arrangements as the last two times he had been there, glad for the sense of familiarity.

True to Hannibal's word, Will had barely seated himself, when Hannibal had arrived with their bowls of stew and a plate of thickly sliced bread that had been coated with butter. After he placed the food on the table he paused by the stereo to put on some music. It was a classical piece, though Will couldn't tell what it was. It was quiet enough to allow for easy

conversation, but loud enough that it would still be comfortable for them to eat in silence. Will had to wonder where Hannibal learnt how to be able to just know what was needed in a situation.

Will waited until Hannibal had returned and been seated before he began to eat, his ingrained manners prevented him from doing otherwise. ***This is amazing***, was Will's first thought, already beginning to feel warmer and he had to remind himself that he was a guest and on a date, to prevent himself from rushing. Looking up at Hannibal, he noticed he was being watched and flushed.

'I think this is easily one of the best stews I have ever eaten,' Will said, dipping another chunk of bread into the stew and swirling it around.

'Thank you. I enjoy that my food brings you pleasure, for I hope you will partake in it often,' Hannibal said, his movement much more graceful with his own food. 'This recipe in particular was one handed down to me. It was made for me often, in my youth, whenever I was feeling particularly poorly and now it is something of a comfort food.'

'I never really had much money when I was growing up,' Will said, feeling the urge to share as Hannibal had. 'My dad tried his best, but there wasn't much work for boat mechanics and we moved around a lot. He would feed me this really watery, canned chicken soup when I was sick, with some, usually stale, bread.'

'Always the new kid at school, always the stranger,' Hannibal said.

'Always,' Will said. 'I never had all that many friends at school. I sort of stayed on the fringes of everyone’s radar... or at least I did until people found out what I was. That didn't go so well and it was the only time we moved because of me.'

'I must admit, I was never one for friends either,' Hannibal said, his eyes drifting up in thought. 'While I am not ready to discuss it, I did not have what people would call an easy childhood and other children could sense that. They could not understand me, nor I them.'

'I had the opposite problem, as you are aware,' Will said dryly. 'I could always tell why people were doing what they were doing, from the people with problems at home to the people that had never had to worry about if their parents can pay for medicine when they are sick.'

'Did you ever have that fear?' Hannibal said, though Will really wished he hadn't. He didn't want pity, or sympathy, since it made it seem like his dad hadn't being trying as hard as he could to provide for them.

'Yes,' Will said, because he might as well at that point. 'I was fourteen and I had a really persistent cold. Money was really thin that month and dad was finding it hard enough to scrape together money for food and other expenses. He was so stressed all the time, and I even heard him crying a few times, so I told my dad it was just allergies. I ended up in hospital with pneumonia a few weeks later.'

'How did you father handle the situation?' Hannibal said and Will wondered which version of Hannibal he was talking to.

'He was devastated, and terrified,' Will said, thinking back on the expression on his father's face. 'I never thought a cold could get so bad, but then I ended up passing out in our kitchen. My dad found me not long after and drove me to the nearest hospital. I've hated them ever since.'

'An environment so full of pain and loss, the very air must scream to you,' Hannibal said and Will nodded, not wanting to talk about how he could tell if a patient had made a turn for the worse, or even died by the mannerisms of the nurses that cared for him. 'How do you fair when you visit Abigail?'

'Fine, mostly,' Will said. 'I've got better at blocking people out.'

'Isolation or overexposure, neither sound like particularly good options,' Hannibal said, sounding thoughtful. 'But maybe together we can find you a third option; one that allows you to have the ties you crave, while not throwing you straight in the deep end.'

'Oh? And this all just seems so simple to you,' Will said, unable to help the sharp edge that his words took when he was afraid, though he could feel Hannibal's disapproval.

'No, it will not be simple and I would not expect it to be,' Hannibal said firmly, causing Will to wince. 'We will take small steps and over time you will find we have covered much more distance than if we acted with haste. For the moment we can begin by working on our relationship and the one you have formed with Abigail.' Will nodded, he knew, despite how easy Hannibal made it seem, those two steps were a lot further than Will had travelled in a while. Before Will could voice his concerns, however Hannibal continued, 'but that is enough talk on that matter for now. We are on a date, not in a session. So, Alana tells me you are fond of fishing?'

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And the night suddenly became a lot more pleasant after that, as Will explained the differences between types of fishing styles, types of baits, types of lures and Hannibal seemed to be genuinely interested in what he had to say on the subject. This ended up leading to a philosophical discussion of the differences between hunting and fishing. As Will listened to Hannibal talk, he couldn't help but feel both awe and intimidation at the intelligence that burned so brightly in Hannibal, who was just as widely read as Will would have imagined he would be.

After dessert, which had been a type of self-saucing chocolate pudding, with a mixture of berries on top, they adjourned to Hannibal's living room to sit near the fire and drink some truly amazing scotch. In fact, Will couldn't remember the last time he had felt to relaxed in someone else's presence and it if wasn't for the fact that he had work the next day, he would

have... He didn't know what he would have done. Maybe asked if Hannibal had a spare bedroom or something.

'So, you have told me a bit about your father; tell me about your mother,' Hannibal said, his eyes on Will as they had been almost the entire evening.

'Going for the low hanging fruit, Doctor Lecter?' Will said, trying not to be too obvious in his admiration of the firelight reflected in Hannibal's eyes.

'I suspect that fruit is on a high branch, very difficult to reach,' Hannibal said. 'Also, we are on a date, call me Hannibal.'

'Alright Hannibal,' Will said, feeling a genuine smile light up his face. 'You are right though, my mother is very difficult to reach. I never knew her. She left my father for an alpha when I was six-months-old.'

'It is unfortunate that there was such a stigma attached to omegas keeping the children of their beta and omega lovers,' Hannibal said. Will just swallowed a mouthful of scotch in response, enjoying the burn as it slid down his throat. 'Both my parents died when I was very young. The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertas when I was sixteen.'

'It's strange, but I have always found there is something so foreign about the concept of family,' Will said, returning his gaze to the firelight. 'Like an ill-fitting suit that I know I should wear, but it chafes and itches whenever I have to put it on.'

'Maybe you were just waiting for the right family?' Hannibal said lightly. 'After all, no one who saw you with Abigail would have known you were not her parent. You even look somewhat alike.'

'Abigail still has a parent,' Will said weakly. 'Surely the courts will take into account the circumstances of Garrett's death.'

'I'm sure they will, however you are forgetting the latest trend in the courts to give harsher penalties to those who murder omegas, particularly when in the context of a domestic relationship, in an attempt to reduce the number killed each year,' Hannibal said and Will could vaguely remember hearing something about that. 'In any case, I doubt Louise Hobbs will be outside of custody for a number of years and I believe Abigail would appreciate your continued presence in her life.'

'I am starting to get that impression,' Will said with a small smile and standing up. 'In any case, I better leave before I drink any more of that amazing scotch and you are forced to deal with me snoring on your couch.'

'You are more than welcome to my guest room, however, I get the feeling that will have to be another time,' Hannibal said, standing also and leading Will to the front door. This time Hannibal allowed Will to handle his own jacket, for which he was grateful of.

'Thank you again for dinner, though why you choose to put up with me so often is beyond me,' Will said, which made Hannibal laugh.

'Now, if you don't mind, there is something I must do before you leave,' Hannibal said, moving closer as he spoke. 'And I fear, if if I do not do so, I will not get a wink of sleep tonight.'

Will felt frozen in place by Hannibal's words, his eyes fixed on Hannibal's mouth, 'and what is...'

Hannibal's warm hand rose to rest itself on Will's face, effectively silencing anything further Will could have said, and Hannibal's thumb stroked across the stubble coating Will cheeks. Then Hannibal was leaning closer into Will's space, swift enough that Will barely felt the breath ghost his lips before it was replaced by the hot, moist press of Hannibal's mouth. A shudder run down Will's spine at the contact and he found himself trying to move closer to increase the sensation flowing through his body.

Will would have been lying if he said he hadn't imagined what it would be like to kiss Hannibal, but where he had expected force, as he had when he had been with other alphas, instead there was softness tinged with reverence, which actually made it rather difficult for Will to think...or breathe. Then the kiss was at an end, leaving them in similar states of breathlessness and Will had to wonder when his hands found their way to Hannibal's shoulders. He pulled them down quickly, not meeting Hannibal's eyes and trying desperately to organise some semblance of thought.

'So, do you think you will be able to sleep now?' Will said, feeling awkward and found himself glancing up sharply when he heard Hannibal laugh again.

'Not a chance of it now,' Hannibal said, his voice teasing and making Will turn bright red. 'Unfortunately, if I was to give it another try, you would not be leaving at all, and you would not be sleeping in the guest room... or on the couch.'

'That confident are you?' Will said, trying for the very same. 'Well I guess I better take your word for it and leave. Goodnight Doctor Lecter.'

'Goodnight Will,' Hannibal said smiling. 'Please send my regards to Abigail when you see her tomorrow.'

Accent

Will felt pretty good the next morning, which was a change. He usually felt pretty terrible after going on a date, but that morning he felt pretty good. He didn't even mind that a couple of the dogs jumped up on his bed during the night. He had got a text from Beverly telling him to come in to see if there was anything they had missed. Fortunately he didn't have class that afternoon, which meant that he had time to duck down to the lab for a couple of hours beforehand.

When he got there, he could see that each of them looked better than they had the last time he had seen them and he wondered how they had managed to weasel so extra free time to sleep from Jack. Beverly looked up immediately when Will walked in and gave him a smile, as the other two bickered in the corner.

'Oh, hey Will,' Beverly said, putting down what she had been examining to come over. 'Someone's looking cheerful today. So spill, I need some good news.'

'Oh,' Will said, smiling despite himself. 'I kind of went on a date last night.'

'You have time for dating?' Beverly said, her hands going to her hips. 'The only reason I am looking even half decent is because Nadia is forcing us to go home at a decent hour to sleep. My boyfriend probably doesn't even remember what I look like.'

'At least you have a boyfriend,' Price said, looking up from whatever he and Zeller had been examining.

'I thought you weren't interested in the whole sex thing?' Beverly said, confused and Price sighed.

'Just because I wouldn't want to play with his trouser snake, doesn't mean I wouldn't appreciate having someone there to snuggle,' Price said, sounding a little offended.

Zeller looked like he was about to say something then, but before he could, Beverly said, 'don't even think about it.'

'So have you found anything?' Will said.

'Unfortunately no,' Beverly said giving a sigh of her own. 'These guys are good and they know how to cover their bases. We haven't found a single image of them anywhere and I haven't found any prints or fibres, except from the clothes and van they stole.'

'Did you find the original caterers?' Will said and Beverly shook her head.

'Jack thinks they were taken like those other people,' Beverly said.

'How have they managed to keep that under wraps anyway?' Will said, folding his arms and leaning against a nearby bench.

‘The absence of Freddie Lounds has certainly helped, but it’s also the fact that a lot of these people aren’t the type that people notice and miss, you know,’ Beverly said, swallowing back the anger in her voice. ‘Why would anyone come to us anyway? I mean, they’re just going to get treated like criminals anyway.’

After a long moment of silence, Will said, ‘Has Jack followed up on that Ripper victim yet?’

‘Yeah, apparently he’s had some cops interviewing people, but we haven’t heard anything yet,’ Beverly said.

‘How do we even know there is anything to find anyway?’ Zeller said, speaking up for the first time. ‘I mean, for all we know, he could have just tried to rob him when he got caught.’

‘No, the Ripper is patient and careful, he wouldn’t want us to be able to make a connection between him and the victim,’ Will said, dismissing the thought. ‘Have you got an ID on the second victim?’

‘Yeah, though this one was harder, since we didn’t have them on record,’ Beverly said, moving away to retrieve a file. ‘Her name was Julie Taylor, forty-eight-years-old, single and has two kids, seven and nine. She was reported missing not long after she failed to pick them up from school.’

‘Where did she work?’ Will said, taking the file to have a look.

‘She was a door-to-door sales person,’ Price said. ‘Been with the company for three years.’

‘Probably wouldn’t have been for much longer, she wasn’t a very good one. From what I have heard, she has received a number of complaints about harassment,’ Beverly said, before her expression turned thoughtful. ‘Do you think the Ripper might be one of the people who have reported her?’

‘It’s unlikely. He would have drawn attention to himself that way,’ Will said, perusing the file, despite knowing he would find nothing. The Ripper was too careful. ‘Did you notice anything missing from the bodies?’

‘Can I say what an absolute blast it has been trying to put together two bodies from chunks of meat,’ Beverly said. ‘I mean, I’m all for jigsaw puzzles, but not when I have to test the DNA of every piece and determine what part of the body it came from.’

‘Long story short, she doesn’t have a liver,’ Price said. ‘She could also be missing a kidney. Our other victim is missing his lungs and most of his intestines.’

‘So the Ripper is making sausage,’ Zeller said.

‘You really think he is eating them?’ Beverly said, a little disturbed.

‘I think the other killers think he is,’ Will said, not sure what else to say.

‘You know, my grandma tried to feed me liver once. It ended up all over her rug,’ Zeller said, which startled a ‘gross’ from Beverly.

‘I’m actually rather partial to pâté,’ Price said. ‘In fact this one time…’

***

Will didn’t hear from Jack again until he had just pulled into the car park of the Port Haven Psychiatric Facility, to visit Abigail.

‘Will, I just thought I should let you know that your theory panned out,’ Jack said, before amending himself. ‘Dominic spoke to someone when he was on the inside. Said Dominic tried a brush pass on someone and got caught. Apparently the guy was wearing a fancy suit, which meant that he didn’t realise the guy did anything more strenuous than take the occasional stroll, at least until the man’s hand was around his neck.’

‘It does make sense the Ripper has money,’ Will said, unbuckling his seatbelt. ‘He is a talented surgeon, but studying medicine is expensive, especially if he has decided to get a second degree.’

‘How do you know he has a second degree?’ Jack said and Will realised that Jack hadn’t noticed that yet.

‘The person who was in the centre of the table, the one who represents the Ripper; the newspapers said he wasn’t a surgeon, but a psychiatrist,’ Will said, things starting to fall into place in his mind. ‘Of course we are depending on them being right and not having just killed the psychiatrist because he was there.’

‘There wouldn’t be too many people who fit that criteria now would there?’ Jack said and he sounded like he was giving the idea some thought, which was probably more than it deserved. ‘I will look into it. We need this Ripper found and if there is the slightest possibility we can use this to find him, then I think I’m desperate enough to use it, even if this does feel like grasping at straws.’

‘Did they say anything else?’ Will said, deciding to get out of the car now that the conversation was winding down.

‘Only that the man had a strange accent,’ Jack said and Will could hear the sound of Jack’s finders drumming against his desk. ‘That might help us narrow down the search again. So I’m looking for a surgeon turned psychiatrist or similar, who has money, is very intelligent and has an accent. Am I missing anything?’

‘They think he is a cannibal,’ Will said and he heard Jack sigh.

‘That too,’ Jack said. ‘I will let you get back to what you were doing and I will get in touch with you if I hear something.’

Victory

‘Will, are you okay? You seem preoccupied,’ Abigail said from where she was sitting on her bed. She seemed brighter today, which was good, but after the conversation with Jack, Will knew he wasn't good company for anybody.

‘I just got a call from Jack,’ Will said, waving his phone absently. ‘We were discussing a crime scene and we think we have some leads.’

‘That’s good, isn't it?’ Abigail said, sounding confused, her arms tightening around her legs.

‘It’s not that easy and the leads are flimsy at best,’ Will said, running his hand through his hair as he looked out the window. It was going to be an absolutely miserable afternoon, which meant muddy floors and wet dog smell for a week.

'So what else have you been up to?' Abigail said, and Will was grateful for the change of subject. 'I mean, I could tell you all about my busy and exiting social life, but that would take me all of five seconds and I would spend half the time trying to think of something worth saying.'

'Well, I went on a first date last night,' Will said, causing Abigail to release a squeal of delight.

'Ohmygodyouhavetotellmeeverything,' Abigail said, her words so fast they were almost unintelligible. 'What is their name? How old are they? Are they an alpha? Where did you meet? Do they work for the FBI...?'

'One at a time Abigail, please,' Will said, bolstered by her enthusiasm. 'His name is Doctor Hannibal Lecter and he is a psychiatrist. He's probably about ten years older than me, and yes, he is an alpha. We met because he is, unofficially my psychiatrist...'

'Ooh, scandalous,' Abigail said laughing and Will gave her shoulder a light shove.

'I told you, it's not official,' Will said grinning. 'Speaking of Hannibal, has Alana told you yet if you can meet my dogs on Saturday?'

'Well, I was on my best behaviour...though I don't know how much of it she believed,' Abigail said, before looking at Will, suspicious. 'Were you telling her stories about me?'

For a moment Will contemplated lying, but then he said, 'No, I can promise you I have told Alana nothing about what you told me.'

'Good,' Abigail said, 'because if you had she probably wouldn't have given me the okay to visit you on Saturday and I just ***have*** to meet your dogs.'

'You do realise that I have spent a lot of time training, playing with and feeding those dogs, they are absolutely loyal to me,' Will said, as it became his turn to be suspicious.

'They are for now,' Abigail said, but it didn't take his ability to empathise to tell that she was joking.

'Well, I was going to say that Hannibal asked if he could come over on Saturday and meet you,' Will said, returning to teasing now. 'But now I am worried you may try and convert him too.'

'Are you lying to me, Mister Graham?' Abigail said, standing up and looking at Will seriously.

'No, of course not,' Will said confused.

'You better not, as it would be very cruel to dangle that in front of me and then not let me meet your sexy doctor,' Abigail said and Will felt his face heat.

'I never said...'

'He isn't?' Abigail cut in and Will's mind was filled with images of the brilliant man he had dined with the night before. His grin had probably turned absolutely silly then, but he couldn't help himself. Hannibal was a gorgeous man. 'He totally is.' Abigail said when Will couldn't bring himself to answer. 'And not only that, but you are smitten.'

Ignoring her question, Will said, 'So how have you been holding up here?'

'It's sucking the soul out of me,' Abigail said, throwing herself dramatically on her bed, arm flung over her face. 'And Alana expects me to find someone to relate to? I mean, I have more fulfilling conversations by talking to Marissa...***in my head***.'

'You really miss her don't you?' Will said and Abigail nodded. 'Do you have her number?' Abigail froze for a moment and slowly removed her arm from her face to look at him. For once he didn't look away and he could see the desperate hope in her eyes. 'All I need then is a feasible cover identity then,' he finished, pulling his phone out of his pocket.

'O-Oscar Martin,' Abigail said, sounding dazed and her eyes fixed on the mobile in his hand. 'That's the name of Marissa's fake boyfriend. She got so sick of people asking her why she wasn't dating that we decided to create her an imaginary one.'

Will nodded, 'type in her number.' Passing the phone over, Abigail just held the phone for a moment before typing her number in with shaky fingers. Once she was done, she stared at it for a long moment, before passing it pack to Will.

'Do you really think this will work?' Abigail said, her eyes following the phone.

'Only one way to find out,' Will said, pressing the call button and bringing the phone up to his ear. Listening to the phone ring, Will nearly jumped when he felt Abigail press up close to try and listen in, so he turned up the volume a bit.

'Hello, this is Catie Schurr,' Marissa's mum said, sounding a little bit breathless as she answered the phone.

'Oh, um, hi Ms Schurr. I'm Oscar Martin, c-can I talk to Marissa?' Will said, pitching his voice a bit higher as he tried to remember how he would have sounded at seventeen.

'Marissa isn't really talking to anyone at the moment,' Catie said, sounding sympathetic, though it didn't quite conceal the frustration beneath it. 'I'll ask her and maybe you might be able to get through to her.'

'I appreciate that Ms Schurr,' Will said, glancing at Abigail who had her fingers crossed in her lap and was biting her bottom lip. In the background, Will could hear Catie tell Marissa who was on the phone and her surprise at Marissa's acceptance.

'Sounds like she will talk to you after all,' Catie said a moment later, as though Will hadn't heard everything anyway. 'Please try and talk some sense into her. You know how stubborn she can be.'

'Mum,' Marissa said, the word almost a demand.

'Marissa,' Catie said, her tone disapproving and Will wondered if the two had ever got along, but Catie must have given up the phone, because the next voice was Marissa's.

'Hey Oscar. Can you believe my mum? She's such a bitch...'

This was followed by an indignant, '***Marissa***.'

'Ever heard of privacy?' Marissa said. A moment later Will heard the door close loudly and Marissa let out a sigh.

'My name is Will Graham and I am calling on behalf of a mutual friend of ours,' Will said, watching as Abigail's face broke out into a grin.

'Figured,' Marissa said, though she was clearly not as unaffected as she was trying to be. 'Put her on?'

'Hey Mar,' Abigail said as Will handed her the phone and moved away to give her a bit of privacy. 'I missed you.'

'...'

'Oh, Will's a teacher with the FBI.'

'... '

'Yeah, we can trust him.'

'...'

'Oh my God, that was the one time,' Abigail said laughing.

'...'

'You're a liar, you know that, Mar?'

'...'

'Mar, you know I didn't kill those girls, don't you?' Abigail said, her smiling disappearing and her free arm came up to hug herself.

'...'

'Since when do you listen to her?' Abigail's arm tightened and Will looked away.

'...'

'I read the front of my house.' Will's ears perked at that. He hadn't known Abigail had been back home since everything had happened, though he guessed Jack probably had something to do with that.

'...'

'Do you think I did it?' Abigail said again.

'...'

'Mine or his?' Abigail said, her voice frustrated.

'...'

'You really mean that?' Abigail said, her voice hopeful.

'...'

'Not much really. Will has basically been the only exciting thing around here,' Abigail said and Will couldn't hold back his smile.

'...'

'No, it's nothing like that,' Abigail said and Will guessed Marissa was accusing him of something. 'Besides, he has a boyfriend and Will said I can meet him when I visit him on Saturday.'

'...'

'Yeah, Alana gave me the okay.'

‘…’

‘You have no idea, but you haven’t even heard the best part; Will has seven dogs.’

‘…’

‘I'm serious, apparently he has been adopting strays.’

‘…’

‘I'm not a stray, Mar,’ Abigail said, laughter returning to her voice.

‘…’

‘Yeah, anyway, I better be going now. Don’t want your mum getting too suspicious.’

‘…’

‘I’ll pass you to Will and he can give you his number.’

‘…’

‘Talk to you on Saturday.’

‘…’

‘Yeah, love you too. Bye,’ Abigail said, walking over to Will and handing the phone over. ‘That’s okay, right?’ Abigail said, looking uncertain.

‘It’s fine,’ Will said, and putting the phone to his ear.

‘Will?’ Marissa said.

‘Yeah.’

‘You better not hurt her or I will rip your balls off and feed them to your dogs,’ Marissa said, making Will grin.

‘Understood. Now I heard you wanted my number…’

***

Hanging up the phone after one final goodbye, Abigail reluctantly handed it back over to Will. When she looked up, her eyes were shining, ‘thank you. After everything that happened... I didn't think I would get to talk to her again... and she actually listened to me. She doesn't think I'm a psycho.’

‘You’re welcome,’ Will said and cleared his throat, feeling awkward now. As his eyes began to wander away from Abigail, they spied the cloth bag on the ground, where he had left it earlier and went over to pick it up. ‘Anyway, before I forget, I brought you these.’ Carrying the bag over, he pulled out a couple of the text books to show Abigail. ‘Some of them are a bit old, since I used them when I was a student, but they are good for basics and it might help you get a bit of an understanding about how different theories have evolved over time.’

‘What’s this?’ Abigail said, pulling out a stack of pages held together by a comb binder.

‘Well, uh, it’s some of the articles I wrote,’ Will said, wondering again what had made him think that was a good idea. ‘It also has an article by Hannibal, it’s at the back.’

‘That is so cool,’ Abigail said, flicking through the pages. ‘Are these published?’

‘As part of my job I have to publish a certain number of articles each year,’ Will said.

‘Huh, and I thought teaching was annoying before,’ Abigail said, nearing the end of the booklet, before pausing on a page. ‘Hey, is this him? Doctor Lecter, I mean.’ Turning the booklet around to face Will, he could see a small portrait of Hannibal, appearing perfectly composed and professional, unlike what he probably looked in half of his own. He’d forgotten there was a picture of Hannibal with the article and he wished that he had paid the extra few cents to get the page in colour rather than in black and white.

‘Yeah, that’s him,’ Will said, looking away at a wall, as his fingers started tapping on his leg.

‘Has he got eyebrows?’ Abigail said, and Will glanced quickly at her to see her studying the photo closely, squinting a little and the tapping stopped as he gave a reluctant grin.

‘...Probably,’ Will said, realising the only time he would have been close enough to see the fair hairs, he was distracted by other things.

‘I don’t know if I would say he’s attractive, I mean he’s old enough to be my dad and all, but he is interesting. Maybe he is one of those people who looks better in real life,’ Abigail said. ‘Where’s he from anyway...? Oh, wait, never mind, it says here in his bio. Lithuania, huh? Does he have a really cool accent?’

‘How about you judge that for yourself when you meet him,’ Will said, not really knowing what else to say.

'Don't think that I won't,' Abigail said, grinning and for Will, that was starting to feel a bit like a victory.

Storm

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry.

The sky was dark when Will left and there seemed to be some cloud activity, but he doubted anything would come of it, due to the time of year. Feeling impatient to get home to his dogs, Will pulled over in a drive-thru, and he had to wonder at what Hannibal would have said if he had seen what Will was about to put into his body. As he got closer to home, he started thinking about what he would do when he got there and was looking forward to having a finger or two of scotch. His dogs would probably want to play, as they usually did if he had spent too much time away from them, though he hoped it wouldn't be for too long, as his bed was sounding nearly as tempting as the scotch.

It was then that he saw it.

If he didn't force himself to be constantly on guard for animals on the roads he probably would have missed it, but seeing a small form off to the side of the road made him pause. After checking to make sure he had his phone, since hadn't brought his gun, he pulled over to check it out.

Now that he was closer, he could see it was a dog, though its fur was matted and filthy and it clearly hadn't eaten in a fair while. There was a rope around it's neck that the dog must have bitten through to get free and Will had to wonder how long it had been out on its own. Moving closer, carefully in case it was awake, he checked it for life signs. They were weak, but present. Walking back to his car, he opened the back seat and moved some junk that had piled up onto the floor, before going to fetch the dog. Once it was safely inside, he climbed in himself and pulled out his phone and dialled.

'What's the problem?' Maria, his vet, said, sounding worried. 'Did something happen to one of your dogs? Was it Buster?'

'It might become my dog...' Will said, glancing back at the dog who he'd started naming Winston in his head.

'You found another one?' Maria said, not even pretending surprise at tis point. 'How bad?'

'He's unconscious and he has weak vital signs. Looks like he has been on his own for a while. Starved, dehydrated, might fleas or something,' Will said, starting up the car to get the heater running.

'When can you get here?' Maria said, and he could hear the sounds of her grabbing her coat and telling her partner she had to go to the surgery.

'I can be there in ten,' Will said.

'Okay, I will unlock so you can come straight through,' Maria said and then she hung up.

***

Maria was in the middle of preparing equipment when he came through carrying Winston. It was always a bit problematic carrying larger dogs and he had to adjust his hold before he was finally able to lay the dog on the table. Maria was there immediately with her stethoscope, listening carefully for a long moment and Will found himself holding his breath.

'You brought him here just in time, but he should be okay,' Maria said, taking the stethoscope from her ears. 'I will have to keep him here for observation for a few days to get his strength up, but then he should be fine to come home with you, though you might need to get him some tablets.

'That's fine,' Will said, relieved that he wasn't too late.

'For now I am going to set him up with an IV and I will give him a bath once he wakes up,' Maria said, pulling the IV stand over and fetching a bag from one of the many drawers and hanging it up. Within a few moments she had everything set up and Winston was receiving much needed fluids. After that, Maria checked Winston's ears for a microchipping tattoo, but not finding one. 'So, what are you going to call this one?' Maria said, nodding to Winston as she went to wash her hands again.

'Winston,' Will said.

'Huh, okay then,' Maria said. 'Well, he will probably be out for a while now, so you might as well go home and get some sleep. I will call you in the morning with an update.'

'Are you sure? I can stay if you will need help with anything,' Will said, trying to feel bad that Maria would probably be spending the night at the clinic, rather than at home in bed, but when his eyes drifted back over to Winston, he found it very hard to maintain.

'No, I will be fine,' Maria said, smiling. 'Go.'

'Okay, but call me if you need anything,' Will said, surrendering. He had tried to stick around the last time he had to bring in a new dog to Maria and, though it had taken an extra half-hour, he had still found himself back in his car and heading home. 'Goodnight Maria, Winston.'

'Goodnight Will,' Maria said, with a bit of a laugh. 'Now shoo.'

'Yes ma'am.'

***

Pulling into the driveway, Will parked his car turned off the engine and just sat there for a long moment. Getting a new dog was always a risk, as he was never quite sure what their temperament would be or how they would handle being around his other dogs. Will had been lucky so far, but Maria had told him stories about owners who had to give up their new dog, because they couldn't get along with the other one.

Getting out of his car, he headed towards the house, and as if summoned by magic, he was suddenly surrounded by his small, furry family. Crouching down, he signalled they could come closer, his hands already outstretched to receive them all. It didn't take much encouragement and soon he was swarmed by them, all eager for his attention. It was times like this that he wished he had more hands, as he was simply unable to pat them all at once, like they seemed to want him to.

Standing up, he whistled for them to follow him inside, pausing only by their food and water bowls to see if they were empty. They weren't and he was just in the process of finding his keys, when his phone rang. Fumbling with the keys, now that he was doing so one handed, his other hand searched his pockets for where he had stashed his phone.

'Hello?' Will said, finally getting the door unlocked.

'Good evening, William,' Hannibal said and Will jerked a little, nearly dislodging his phone, which was held between his head and his shoulders as he shoved his keys back into his pocket and opened the door.

'Hannibal? So I take it that you are sick of me yet?' Will said and received a low chuckle that sent a shiver up his spine.

'The opposite, I assure you,' Hannibal said. 'In fact, my dining room feels quite empty without you, so I decided to call and ask you how your day was?'

Will could feel the goofy smile on his face, but he couldn't help it. 'It was pretty good actually. I mean, we haven't really gotten anywhere on the case, but my visit with Abigail went well and...' Will paused, remembering something. 'Hannibal, I might have told Abigail we were on a date last night.'

'Is that a problem?' Hannibal said, sounding more curious than concerned.

'Not really, but I realised we hadn't exactly talked about if you were okay with me telling people,' Will said, taking a seat in the lounge. Buster jumped up beside him immediately and Will reached out a hand to scratch him behind the ears.

'If you wish to tell someone, then I will not stop you,' Hannibal said and Will wondered if he could hear a smile in Hannibal's voice.

'Well, Beverly wanted to know why I was so cheerful this morning when I came in and Abigail... Well, she is looking forward to meeting you now, that's for sure,' Will said, his happiness and anxiety coiling together in strange ways in his stomach.

'And I, her,' Hannibal said and Will could hear a faint scratching in the background. 'Did you speak of anything interesting today?'

'Well, she asked a lot about you and what you look like and then I may have assisted her in getting in contact with Marissa Schurr,' Will said, feeling remarkably like he was seeking reassurance, even though he knew calling her had been the right thing to do at the time.

'And how did you manage that? As I recall Ms Schurr did not approve of contact between her daughter and Abigail,' Hannibal said, the barest hint of mischief in his voice, which was actually a little distracting really.

'Well, Abigail told me that the two of them had created a fake boyfriend for Marissa when her mum kept asking why she didn't have a boyfriend, so Abigail knew it would be a name Ms Schurr would recognise, while at the same time, not accidentally stumble across anything that would contradict what I was telling her,' Will said, shooing Buster away, and trying, unsuccessfully, to shoo Maggie away, who had taken up residence on his lap and had started licking his sleeve. After a moment Maggie seemed to notice that Will was trying to get her attention and looked up with him with huge liquid eyes. With a sigh, he gave in and let her do what she liked, before realising he had missed part of what Hannibal had been saying.

'...been replaced already?' Hannibal said with mock concern.

'Sorry, I was a bit distracted, one of my dogs has decided it wants some attention, or at least, has decided it like the flavour of my shirt,' Will said.

'It is no matter and will probably be something I will have to get used to,' Hannibal said with an exaggerated sigh. 'What was your impression of Marissa Schurr?'

'I can see why Abigail likes her so much. She is very confident and self-assured, has strong morals and doesn't let people walk all over her. All qualities that Abigail probably wants more of,' Will said, trying not to sound too much like he was profiling her for Jack. 'She can be a little bit blunt sometimes, and like me, can be a little rude when scared and she is scared. She has been separated from a friend who needs her and she can only hope that this strange, older guy, she has never met, might be able to help her friend.'

'If it helps, I do not believe her hope is misplaced. Abigail's outlook on life has improved greatly since you have entered her life, or at least, that is what Alana has informed me,' Hannibal said.

Will let out a long breath. 'I hope you're right.'

'I do tend to be,' Hannibal said, causing Will to let out a snort of a laugh.

'Yeah, well...' Will trailed off, listening to that sound again. '...Hannibal, what are you doing?'

'I hope you do not mind, but I like to keep my hands occupied and so I have been working on a drawing I had left on my desk,' Hannibal said.

'No, that's fine,' Will said, wondering, not for the first time, why Hannibal would be interested in someone like him. 'I would like to see some of your drawing sometime though.'

'I am sure that could be arranged,' Hannibal said. 'Maybe I might bring one over for you on Saturday, and one for Abigail, of course.'

'I think she would appreciate that, Hannibal,' Will said. 'Before I forget, though, I should tell you that I will probably be getting another dog very soon.'

'Oh?'

'Yeah, I found him beside the road on my way home and brought him to the vet. He wasn't registered, but he wasn't in the greatest shape, so he will have to stay at the vet for a few days until I can care for him at home,' Will said, his eyes on his pack and tried not to understand how anyone could have abandoned their dog like that.

'What will you call him?' Hannibal said.

'Winston,' Will said. 'Maria, my vet, didn't really like it, but it's better than Pavlov.'

'Indeed it is,' Hannibal said. 'In any case, I should allow you to go, as I am sure you have other things to be doing and I need to close my office for the night.'

'Yeah, but I will call you on Friday with details about Abigail's visit,' Will said.

'Goodnight Will.'

'Goodnight Hannibal.'

Then there was only the dial tone and Will hung up. For a while, he found himself wandering around the house, until his feet carried him outside. From a distance, his house looked like a boat on the water, like one that his father would repair back when Will was young. Sometimes his father would ask the owner if Will could have a ride in the boat after he repaired it, for a discount. They didn't always say yes, but some would and for a short while, Will would get to feel the breeze of the water on his face and know that everything was okay. Now, he just walks outside and stares at his house with all the lights on and for a short while he feels safe from the storm.

***

At 7:49 AM, Will received a phone call from Beverly Katz, about a new crime scene and to think, he had been having such a good sleep for once.

Decay

The drive to Elk Neck State Park was a mostly quiet one and gave Will plenty of time to muddle over Beverly's rather cryptic clue about 'gardening'. From reports so far, it was considered unlikely that whoever was killing these people was the Chesapeake Ripper or the ones hunting him, and Jack had been biting people's heads off all morning. Will hadn't really been expecting for Jack to call him in for other cases though and the novelty of the situation was wearing off.

'Sorry sir, but this is a restricted area,' the police officer at the barricade said, when Will approached.

'That's okay. I work with the FBI as a special investigator,' Will said and the officer looked distinctly unimpressed. 'Beverly Katz called me in to take a look?'

That earned Will a huff and the officer shouted out to some officer named Pearson to take over, as he went in search of Beverly. Fortunately, Will didn't have long to wait for Beverly's familiar face to appear. She didn't bother to come over, just gave an agitated gesture for the officer to let Will through and Will didn't need a second invitation, ducking under the tape immediately and heading over. Once Will was close enough, Beverly turned to head back to where the others were gathered.

'Three kids found the crime scene,' Beverly said in lieu of a greeting. 'Apparently they thought it was a marijuana plant, or at least they did until they saw the hands sticking out of the ground.'

'How many are there?' Will said, though he probably could have answered himself, now that he had arrived.

'We have found seven so far,' Beverly said, 'though Jack has sent some cops with a couple of park rangers to sweep the area and make sure there isn't any more around.'

'Will,' Jack said, spotting him from where he was crouched near one of the bodies. Price was crouched next to him and Will guessed they had been talking moments before. Shooting Beverly a quick glance, Will headed over to Jack who stood up. 'Local police found some small animal traps in the surrounding woods. They even discovered a thirty gallon drum of pesticide hidden in a hollow of a tree along with a rusted Radio Flyer wagon.'

'Didn't want his ***crop*** disturbed,' Will said, finally able to take a better look at the bodies. As Beverly said, there were seven of them and all in various stages of decomposition, as their bodies gave way to allow the growth of a multitude of various fungi.

'All that's missing is the scarecrow,' Jack said, and Will nodded. It was then that Beverly and Brian wandered over to assist Price in removing the breathing tubes from the bodies.

'Seven bodies, various stages of decay, all very well fertilised,' Jimmy said and Zeller removed the tape from the closest victim. Despite knowing what to expect, Will had to fight a

cringe as he watch a swathe of skin peel away with the tape. Meanwhile, Beverly reached into the grave and pulled out a handful of rich, dark soil, which stood out again the graves brown clay walls.

'He buried them in a high-nutrient compost,' Beverly said, in answer to Will's thoughts. 'He was enthusiastically encouraging decomposition.'

'Patient way to dispose of a body,' Jimmy said, with which Will had to agree. Obviously this meant there was more to the growth of the fungus, than just decomposition, but what?

'They were buried alive with the intention of keeping them that way,' Brian said. 'At least for a little while.'

'Long enough for the fungus to eat any distinguishing features and make it nearly impossible to tell how long they'd been in the ground,' Jimmy said and Will had to agree, as the bodies seemed to more resemble pot plants than humans.

Brian pointed over to a catheter in the victim's outstretched arm, which was supported by a section of rebar and said, 'line and rebar were to administer intravenous fluids after burial. He was feeding the something.'

Something niggled at Will's mind though and it wasn't just his headache. 'There were no restraints? They weren't bound? Nothing to stop them crawling out?'

'Just dirt,' Jimmy said and Will frowned. If he wasn't restraining them then how had the killer managed to keep them underground long enough for them to die, or was something else killing them? It probably had something to do with the fluid they were being fed, though he would have to wait to find out what exactly that solution was.

'The other end of the air supply system comes up over there,' Beverly said, pointing over to a small umbrella in the grass. Pulling on a rubber glove, Will went to have a look and found a piece of tubing sticking out of the ground. 'It isn't a very considerate clean air solution, which clearly wasn't a priority. Cause he's not lazy.'

'No, he's not,' Will said and at that moment, something must have shown on his face, as Jack immediately started to clear the area. Taking a deep breath, Will exhaled and closed his eyes. Fear was once again feeling like a touchstone, something always within reach and it did not take him long to get back into that headspace. His senses sharped, becoming more aware of his surrounding, before he inverted that awareness to the internal.

In the darkness of Will's mind, a pendulum swung back and fourth in his head. He had discovered this trick quite by accident during a music lesson and soon he began using it as a tool to centre himself. As he concentrated, the scene around him came into focus in his minds eye. It did not remain as it was for long, and the scene rewound until he was standing over a man. Just a generic man Will had probably seen on the streets, or he could have even been an officer investing the scene today. It was unimportant. In Will's mind, he crouches down, shoving an oxygen tube into the man's nose and covering his eyes and mouth with duct tape. Next he tethered the tube to a piece of rebar.

'I choose this man. I do not bind his arms or legs as I bury him in a shallow grave. He is alive, but he will never be conscious again.'

Climbing out, Will picks up the shovel again, and shovels a load of compost from the wagon, preparing to dump it on the man below.

'He won't know he's dying. I don't need him to. This is my design.'

Opening his eyes, Will freezes.

Instead of the rotting, mushroom riddled corpse he had been expecting, there lay the bullet ridden body of Michelle Cooper, her eyes staring up at him, large, white and terrifyingly vacant. Will closed his eyes, feeling as though caught in a vacuum. There was no air. His breathing picked up and he had to squeeze his eyes long enough that they were beginning to hurt, before he opened them again.

When he opened his eyes again, she was gone and there was only a man covered in fungus and mould. Letting out a sigh of relief, Will felt himself sag a little.

'Shit!' Will said, nearly falling backwards as the 'corpse' grabbed his arm and a rattled, wet gasp signalled that somehow, despite barely resembling a human any longer, he was still alive. Will could barely hear the sounds of the other's coming over, but a few moments later he was being pried away from the body, his eyes wide, but seeing nothing beyond what was in that grave.

Someone must have seen his distress, as a moment later he was being pulled up against someone and something was being draped across his shoulders.

'There, there little bird, you're okay, you're okay,' Will heard spoken to him as if from a distance. 'You had quite the shock there didn't you hun, but that's okay. You're alright.'

Will focused on that voice and let the sound slowly carry him out of his head. Soon he was once again able to recognise the forest in front of him, and he turned and then had to look up a little at the really, really tall woman who was standing beside him. She had olive skin, glasses and her dyed strawberry blond hair was pulled back in a bun at the nape of her neck. It clearly hadn't been touched up in a while, as grey was coming through at the roots. She was omega, though she was post-menopausal and he guessed she would have been in her mid-sixties.

'Oh, hey honey, you okay?' The woman said, allowing Will to pull away now that he had gained his awareness back.

'Yeah, I'm fine,' Will said, clearly lying through his teeth.

'Do you want me to call someone for you?' The woman said, but Will shook his head. 'Okay hun, I'll just stay here with you for a bit, okay? My name's Nadia Whitman, though you can call me Nadia or Nana, whichever you prefer.'

'Nana?' Will said, guessing there was a story there.

'Oh, it was just a nickname I picked up in my twenties. I used to dote on all my friend's children, like a Nana would and soon they had all their kids calling me that,' Nadia said, smiling like the name was a badge of pride for her.

'Beverly mentioned you have been making sure they all get enough rest lately,' Will said, remembering suddenly where he had heard her name mentioned.

'Oh, they are such darlings, but they work too hard,' Nadia said, waving off the comment, though Will could tell she was pleased. 'It's no good for anyone if they miss something because they are too tired to think properly. That is what I am always telling my Miro. He never listens though and then I find he stayed in lab all night, dissecting one formula or another... A mother's work is never done.'

'Would you excuse me? I have to call someone,' Will said pulling out his phone. He hadn't even realised he wanted to call someone before that moment, he just needed an excuse to get away. Nadia meant well, but he wasn't used to people coddling him and the feeling was suffocating.

'Okay, little bird. Make sure you take of yourself and I'll be seeing you again soon,' Nadia said and Will stood up and left without a reply.

When he made it far enough away, he raised his phone and just looked at for a long moment, unsure whether or not to dial. He knew he was being stupid and he should just call, but that he had calmed down, her wondered if he wasn't just tired. Still, he flipped his phone open and dialled.

'Good morning, this is Doctor Lecter,' Hannibal said, and Will felt some of his tension ease at the sound.

'Hi Hannibal, it's Will. Is this a bad time,' Will said.

'It is never a bad time for you, Will. Is everything alright?' Hannibal said and Will thought he could hear concern in his voice.

'That's why I'm calling actually,' Will said, his resolve weakening. 'Would it be okay if I come by soon? I need to talk to you about something that just happened on a case?'

'You are working on a case?' Hannibal said and Will realised that he probably wouldn't have heard about it yet.

'Yeah, some boys found some bodies out in the woods, looking like the work of a serial killer. We found six dead so far and the seventh is in really bad shape. Probably won't make it,' Will said, starting to pace and counting his steps as he did. 'So can I see you?'

'As luck would have it, I do not have my first appointment until midday, so you are quite welcome, as I was simply going to be doing some paperwork before then,' Hannibal said.

'Okay, I will just talk to Jack and then I will head over. See you soon,' Will said.

'I look forward to it,' Hannibal said and Will hung up. Putting his phone away, he pulled out his aspirin and shook a couple into his hand. It was time to face Jack.

Divide

Chapter Notes

> Just so you all know, chapter 21 will be the last chapter I post for about 10 days or so, since I will be in a very limited internet area, aka, visiting family. I am hoping to get some writing down while I am away, I hope you enjoy this chapter and thanks for reading.

As with last time, Will did not have long to wait before Hannibal answered the door with a smile.

'Will, please come in,' Hannibal said, stepping aside to allow Will entrance. 'Would you care for something to drink?'

'Water, please,' Will said, walking in, before he realised he wasn't sure what he was supposed to be doing. Was he supposed to take a seat or what. Instead he found himself shuffling around the room until Hannibal returned with his glass of water. Hannibal proceeded to take a seat in one of the opposing chairs and Will followed suit.

'So, Will, tell me about this man you are hunting,' Hannibal said and Will relaxed a bit, grateful for the direction.

'Well, to put in the most simplest terms, this killer has expressed an interest in gardening. He buried all seven of his victims, that we are currently aware of, alive and in a high nutrient compost. He would leave their arms exposed and then continuously feed them a solution intravenously as their bodies break down,' Will said, feeling himself slipping into his instructor mode. 'I do not believe the victims suffered, or ever knew they were dying.' Will removed his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. The aspirin he had taken earlier had just dulled the ache in his head and he wondered if it was due to the additional stress he was under.

'So, tell me what brought you here to me,' Hannibal said and Will paused, taking a deep breath.

'I saw something today, when I was out in the field,' Will said.

'What did you see?' Hannibal said.

'Michelle Cooper,' Will said simply.

'I am afraid I do not understand. Who is Miss Cooper?' Hannibal said and, belatedly, Will realised that he would actually have to explain what had happened to him. He had gotten so

used to people just seeming to know about it that he never really had to explain what had happened.

'A fair few years ago, I was a police officer in homicide and I worked on, what came to be known as, the Macey Case, named after the first victim, Trevor Macey,' Will said, his anxiety driving him from the chair.

Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Left foot.

'The killer was an omega named Michelle Cooper, an omega girl who had started dating an omega boy, in a school environment that didn't accept those types of relationships,' Will said, his tone bitter. 'They were found out and bullied extensively. Text messages, phone messages, emails, death threats, beatings. They were humiliated and degraded and in the end her boyfriend committed suicide. She killed six of her classmates and left three with rather lasting mutilations to their arms and face.'

'You didn't just empathise with this girl, did you, Will? You feel sympathy for her, and are, to an extent glad for her level of success,' Hannibal said and the words struck Will like a blow.

Reeling back, his emotions seemed to spin out of control, anger being one of the most prominent ones and he said, 'how dare you...? Yes, she was in a bad place and those kids deserved to be punished for what they did, but she had no right to do what she did to them.'

'I apologise if I spoke out of turn,' Hannibal said, bowing his head, as Will seethed. 'It sounds as though there is more to this story...?' Taking a deep breath, Will closed his eyes and tried to calm himself before speaking again.

'Eventually we caught up to her, but she had received a tip off somehow and she had gone after the last four classmates. One of the died, the rest were the ones who survived her,' Will said, trying not to allow the pictures images to return to his mind. 'I was the one who found her, but before I could do anything, she used her knife and stabbed my shoulder. Shortly after the other members of my squad showed up and Michelle was killed.'

'And this is the official version of events?' Hannibal said and Will noticed then that Hannibal's eyes were closed in thought.

'Yes, why?' Will said, not understanding the question.

'I am trying to understand why Miss Cooper continues to haunt you,' Hannibal said, opening his eyes. 'So I take it, when you claim to have seen her, you mean an association?'

'A hallucination,' Will said, correcting him. 'I saw her lying there... in someone else's grave.'

'Did you tell Jack what you saw?' Hannibal said and Will shook his head.

'No.'

'It's stress. Not worth reporting. The mechanism the distinguishes between conscious perceptions and internal perceptions misfired. You displaced the victim of another killer's crime with what could arguably be considered your victim,' Hannibal said simply.

'I don't considered Michelle my victim,' Will said, confused as to why that almost felt like a lie.

'You were the one who found her, and it is quite possible that if you had not, she might have been successful in her endeavour. Instead she is dead and you have been left scarred by the experience,' Hannibal said, but Will refused to hear any more of it.

'She was not my victim. I did not shoot her and I did not force her to attack us when we came to arrest her,' Will said, and Hannibal gave a slight nod.

'Very well,' Hannibal said. 'Your farmer let his crops die, save for the one who didn't.'

'The one who didn't, died on the way to hospital,' Will said, pausing in his pacing to just stare at the ground. 'They weren't crops. They were the fertiliser. The bodies were covered in fungus.'

'Mycelium kill the forest over and over, building deeper soil to grow larger and larger trees,' Hannibal said, standing up from his chair to walk over and lean against his desk.

'If it was just about the soil, why bother keeping the victims alive?' Will said, his annoyance evaporating now that Hannibal was providing such an interesting distraction.

'The structure of fungus mirrors that of the human brain. An intricate web of connections,' Hannibal said and Will could almost feel the ideas as they began to spark in his mind.

'Maybe he admires their ability to connect in ways the human mind can't,' Will said, starting to feel a touch of excitement at the discovery of the missing piece.

'Yours can,' Hannibal said, an odd note in his voice, but Will laughed. He never really understood the fascination with his way of thinking... Or at least he liked to pretend he didn't.

'Not physically,' Will said, but Hannibal deserved a better answer than that. 'Not with reciprocity.'

'Is that what your farmer is looking for? Some sort of connection,' Hannibal said and it was beginning to seem more and more likely that was exactly what the killer was looking for.

'It seems that way, but now we have to work out what sort of connection he is looking for,' Will said, moving to lean on the chair he had been sitting on. 'Or at least how he chooses his victims.'

'You are seeking a connection with Abigail, are you not?' Hannibal said, 'do you know what it is you are seeking?'

'No, not exactly,' Will said, worried if that was the wrong answer.

'Then maybe your farmer feels the same way,' Hannibal said. 'Creating a connection and hoping it will result in his favour.'

'Maybe,' Will said, thought the killer felt too practical to leave anything to chance.

'How is Jack handling this development?' Hannibal said, causing Will to grimace slightly.

'Not very well, apparently, though he has been saving it mostly for his forensic team,' Will said, wanting to feel guilty for the relief he felt. 'I don't blame him though, all the murders just in the last few weeks would be enough to stress anybody out.'

'Indeed it would, though many would not care to see it that way,' Hannibal said.

'Well I have to work with him,' Will said. 'Speaking of which, I should be going now. I have taken up enough of your time.'

'Will,' Hannibal said, straightening and walking towards him. 'I want you to know, you are welcome to call on me whenever you need. I cannot promise I will always be available, but I will try and help you in whatever way I can and my home is always open to you.'

'Uh, thanks,' Will said, not really sure how to deal with such a gesture. He had never really had much reason to get used to the idea of someone wanting to be there for him. 'Same, I guess, though I'm not sure how much a comfort my house would be with so many dogs and everything...'

'William,' Hannibal said, and *wow, when had he gotten so close*. 'You are enough.'

And well, damn, there was only one way to respond to something like that. Lifting his hands up, he pulled Hannibal's face down to his own and kissed him. Hannibal did not seem to object, if the smile Will could feel against his lips was anything to go by and Will allowed his hands to slip to the back of Hannibal's head, running his fingers lightly through Hannibal's hair. It was soft and Will wondered, fleetingly, what Hannibal used to style it.

This close, Hannibal's scent was beginning to drive him a little crazy and he longed to taste the skin of Hannibal's neck. Distantly, Will realised that Hannibal was probable due for his rut in the near future, but with his head spinning so pleasantly it was difficult to concentrate on thoughts like that. As if reading Will's thoughts, Hannibal slowed their kisses down until they were mere chaste pecks, before, reluctantly, pulling away.

'I better go,' Will said, his eyes lingering on Hannibal's lips, which glistened temptingly.

'If you must,' Hannibal said. 'I shall see you and Abigail on Saturday.'

Shadows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the time 11am came around on Saturday morning, Will was completely stressed out. Hannibal had agree the day before, that he would arrive an hour early and they would arrange lunch together, to have ready for once Abigail had arrived at noon. Will had gone shopping the day before, once he had realised that he barely had enough food in his cupboards for himself, let alone others.

This had also given Will the opportunity to clean out his house, in particular, his kitchen cupboards and he found a number of utensils he had no idea what to even do with, let alone knew that he had them and in the end he decided to just clean everything... or at least that had been the plan.

All day his dogs had been hovering around him, curious as to what he was doing and trying to ease the anxiety they could sense from him. In the end it had been Toffee coming over to him with a ball that had broken him and he found himself spending a rather pleasant day running around with his dogs, before taking them for a long walk around the property. When he had returned home, he promptly forgot what he had been doing and had dinner. He then proceeded to pick up a book he had started reading for research for his next paper and lost himself in it until it was time for bed.

It was for this reason that he was scrambling to wash the floors once 11am came around and he silently prayed for a few more minutes, so that he could have the mop put away before Hannibal got there. It seemed he was out of luck, as he was barely wringing the mop out for the final time, when he heard his dogs bark at the sound of Hannibal's car on the driveway. Hurrying, he leant the mop against a wall and barely managed to empty the bucket into the sink without spilling it everywhere, before storing it under the sink and going to answer the door.

Opening the door, he smiled as he saw Hannibal standing there with a couple of paper grocery bags and fabric case the size of a laptop. Hannibal was, as always, dressed in a suit, which only served to make Will feel even more disorganised than he already did. It was hard to hold onto those doubts, however, with Hannibal looking at him like that.

'Good morning, Hannibal,' Will said, stepping aside to allow Hannibal admittance. 'I see you've met my family,' he added, indicating the dogs that had followed Hannibal inside.

'Good morning, Will, and indeed I have,' Hannibal said, allowing Will to take the bags and bring them over to the kitchen. 'You will have to show me which one is which, however, as I am afraid I do not know much about dog breeds.'

'That's okay,' Will said, 'are you okay with having them around, or would you prefer they stay outside?'

'As long as they stay out of the kitchen, they may stay,' Hannibal said, walking over to join Will. 'Speaking of which, I hope you don't mind, but I have brought some of my own ingredients to prepare lunch with.'

'That's fine,' Will said. 'What's in the case?'

Hannibal looked slightly abashed then, before he said, 'I may have also brought a knife set.' Will laughed as Hannibal lay the case down and opened it to reveal the knives. Though his own weren't cheap, as his dad had told him a number of times when he was growing up, that he should invest in a good set of knives, the whole set probably couldn't have bought a single knife in that case.

'So, what will we be making?'

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They ended up making a batch of small, savoury pastries, or at least Hannibal did, while Will focused on cutting up ingredients for a salad. While they worked, Will talked about his dogs, how he had gotten each of them, why he gave them certain names and a bit about their different personalities. He tried to ignore the fact that he could tell that Hannibal wasn't all that interested in the dogs themselves, but just enjoyed listening to Will talk about something he was so passionate about, but it wasn't that easy. Still it passed the time and before long the hour was up and Alana had arrived with Abigail.

Calling his dogs over to the door, he got them to sit, before turning to open it. Abigail's face lit up the moment the door opened, as he hoped it would, once she had spotted the dogs. Alana's face was less encouraging, however, as a frown creased her features, her posture defensive and Will couldn't help but feel this reflected on her view of him, rather than just her concern for Abigail.

'Good morning, Will,' Abigail said, reverting his attention back to her.

'Good morning, Abigail, Alana,' Will said, his good cheer returning when he saw how Abigail's eyes fixed on his dogs.

'Good morning Will, I take it Hannibal's here?' Alana said.

'Yeah, he's in the kitchen making the finishing touches on lunch, would you like to come in?' Will said and straight away he could tell she was tempted to do just that.

'No, that's okay. I will back around four, to pick her up, since she has a session later,' Alana said finally. 'Abigail, call me if you need anything. They have my number.'

'Thanks, Alana,' Abigail said.

'See you later, Will,' Alana said, and headed back to her car. Once she was gone, Will allowed his dogs to race over to Abigail, greeting her enthusiastically, which caused her to giggle.

'You really do have six of them,' Abigail said, delighted and crouched down to pat them all.

'And I will be picking up the seventh tomorrow. Winston,' Will said, giving in and patting Toffee, who was pressing against his leg. 'I found him on the side of the road on the way home from visiting you, actually, but he had been on his own for a while and so he had to spend a few days at the vets before he was well enough to come home with me.'

'That's awful,' Abigail said and Will just nodded. 'I am glad you found him, though I guess that just means I will have to visit again so I can meet him.

'Well, Hannibal's probably done in the kitchen, if you want to come in and meet him before we have lunch,' Will said, unable to help smiling at the idea that Abigail was already planning another visit.

'Okay,' Abigail said, straightening up some, before bending down to give Cherry one last pat. Opening the door, Will held it open for Abigail and the dogs to come inside, before leading her over to the kitchen.

'Hannibal, I would like you to meet Abigail. Abigail this is Doctor Hannibal Lecter,' Will said, watching as the two sized each other up.

'Abigail, it is a pleasure to meet you. Will has told me a lot about you,' Hannibal said, nodding his head to her.

'Will has told me a lot about you too,' Abigail said and suddenly Hannibal's attention had returned to Will with a small smile.

'Has he now?' Hannibal said, causing Will to feel rather awkward.

'He even brought me one of your papers to read,' Abigail said and Will thought that Hannibal seemed a little impressed.

'Well, if you have any questions, feel free to ask them,' Hannibal said. 'A learning mind should not be quieted.'

'Cool, though I will probably have to do some more reading first,' Abigail said.

'Abigail, if you want, we can wash our hands and have lunch now, or we can have it later if you want to go for a walk first, since you're probably sick of being cooped up,' Will said.

'I guess we can have lunch first,' Abigail said and Will led Abigail to his bathroom, glad that he had cleaned it recently, even if it still looked a bit shabby.

'So?' Will said, leaning against the back wall, while he waited for Abigail to wash her hands first.

'I must admit, he does look better in colour, and person,' Abigail said, sounding thoughtful. 'And he does have a pretty cool accent.'

'But...?' Will said, watching Abigail frown in the mirror, as she tried to put her thoughts into words.

'He's very...alpha, isn't he?' Abigail said and Will wasn't really sure what to say to that. He hadn't really thought about Hannibal just in terms of alpha characteristics before, since he usually just associated them with the loud, stupid and violent.

'Huh,' Will said, deciding it would be something to think about later on.

'So, how much of the cooking did you have to do?' Abigail said.

'Just the salad,' Will said, a bit sheepishly, as he swapped places with Abigail at the sink. 'Though once you have tried Hannibal's cooking you will be glad I did.'

'That good, or are you that bad?' Abigail said, cautiously and Will just laughed.

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When they finally returned to the table, Hannibal had plated the food and placed it on the small table for them. Will had never really had any guests at his house, so he'd had to pull the third chair from where it usually stayed by his fly fishing set.

'You were taking so long I was just about to come and fetch you,' Hannibal said, with a small smile and Will guided Abigail over to the table and took his own seat. ‘But before I forget, I believe I promised Will that I would bring you both one of my sketches each.’

‘You draw?’ Abigail said, surprised and Hannibal chuckled.

‘I believe Will had a very similar reaction,’ Hannibal said and walking over to pick up a small binder and carrying it over to the table.

‘We can look at them after lunch,’ Will said, realising that the pastries would probably be cold if they looked at the then.

'This looks amazing,' Abigail said, sitting down. 'Are you sure you made all of this?'

'We should have enough for seconds, if you want it,' Will said, smiling.

'So, Will tells me you are not too fond of your current accommodations, Abigail,' Hannibal said, causing her expression to dim.

'It's just, they are trying to make me feel like a victim, while at the same time they are telling me that I'm a survivor or something. I mean, what kind of person has to ***survive*** their own

family and have it be an accomplishment?' Abigail said, her voice growing steadily louder as she spoke.

'There's no such thing as getting used to what you experienced,' Will said, losing his appetite a little. 'I can only imagine how much it bothers you.'

'He's like this shadow in the back of my head, and when it gets dark and quiet, he's there again,' Abigail said, not needing to say who 'he' was. Will wished he could move closer to comfort her, but he wasn't sure she would want it.

'How about I cover the food and we will go for a short walk?' Will said and Abigail just nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks everyone for reading. I must admit, I nearly forgot about Hannibal's promise to give Will and Abigail a drawing each. Oops. Anyway, as I said in the previous chapter, this will be my last post till the 28th, as I will be going to visit family and it is pretty much an internet free zone. I am planning on doing some writing while I am away though, as I have said before, since I am currently only about 7 chapters ahead of you.

Pretend

Chapter Notes

> And we are back. Sorry for the delay. Unfortunately, as I am going back to uni in a few days, my updating schedule might be a little bit hectic, but I will try and keep it to every couple of days. Looking forward to hearing what you think about this chapter.

For a while, the three lapsed into silence, only the sounds of the dogs' occasional barks as they played around them. Will didn't think any of them had a destination in mind, but he hoped that being outside of the various confined spaces was helping Abigail.

For someone who was used to spending all their time outdoors, being forced to stay inside chaffed and made every breath feel hollow. He'd hated every moment he had been confined to a hospital room and he didn't think Abigail would be any different.

'Will,' Abigail said, cutting into his musings. 'Have you...have you ever killed somebody?'

Will froze, not entirely sure what Abigail wanted him to say, but Hannibal answered for him before he could get his thoughts in order to reply. 'Will is a teacher, I doubt that has leant itself to any scenarios where such an act would be necessary.'

'Well, that's not entirely true, anymore at least, or I wouldn't need you around,' Will said, with a wry smile.

'I would like to think our time together is for more than simply work purposes,' Hannibal said, a little miffed.

Laughing, Will said, 'I wouldn't be dating you if it was; anyway, Abigail, lately I have been assisting Jack Crawford to solve a few of his cases, which does require some degree of field work. It's nothing I haven't done before really, since I worked in New Orleans for a while, as a homicide detective, before becoming a teacher.'

'Do many omegas work in police departments?' Abigail said. Will knew she didn't mean it in a bad way, but it just wasn't something people talked about. People knew omega police officers existed, of course, yet it still seemed to surprise people when they actually met one.

'A few, though most of them prefer desk jobs to field work,' Will said, taking a deep breath to try an head off the question that he knew she was going to ask. 'As for me, I have a...talent, you could call it, plenty enough people do, to empathise with people and I thought I should use it to help catch criminals.'

'What happened?' Abigail said.

'I made a bad call. I chose not to pull the trigger and got myself stabbed. I started looking for a new job not long after,' Will said, and he could see Abigail turning his words over in her head for a while.

'Where did they stab you?' Abigail said.

'She stabbed in in the shoulder, causing damage to the rotator-cuff,' Will said, feeling his shoulder twinge just thinking about it. 'After that, I basically had to completely relearn how to shoot properly.'

'What do you mean by empathise with people?' Abigail said, slowing her walking down to a stop.

'It's hard to explain really, but, if the evidence is there, I can use it to reconstruct how a crime occurred and use that to gain insight into why they did what they did. Really it is more a matter of an over-active imagination,' Will said, wishing he hadn't brought the subject up.

'How?' Abigail said, sounding curious and a bit nervous.

'To put it simply, I pretend to be them,' Will said, wondering if he wasn't just regurgitating every assumption he had ever heard about his gifts and rejected. 'It's like…the person has left their shadow in the room and I can step into that shadow in order to determine what was left behind.'

'Abigail,' Hannibal said, as though realising Will was feeling discomforted. 'Have you heard from your mother at all recently?'

'Uh, yeah,' Abigail said, seeming a little disorientated by the subject change. 'Yesterday, she called. I didn't really want to talk to her though. I'm... angry, I guess.'

'Why are you angry?' Hannibal said, though Will knew he already had worked out the answer.

'I don’t know. I mean, my mum, she could have just gone to the police, or... something. She didn't have to kill him,' Abigail said, her eyes bright.

'Maybe she thought that was the only way to protect you properly?' Hannibal said. 'After all, she had no way of knowing when your father might have chosen to make you his next victim and the police might not have been able to find the evidence they needed to convict him... or it might implicate you.'

'Fat load of good that did,' Abigail said, with a bit of a huff. 'People still think I did it, no matter what I say.'

'Unfortunately, there will always be those who have their doubts,' Hannibal said, his voice gentle. 'But I do not, and nor does Will.'

'And neither, I would think, does Marissa,' Will said, glad to see Abigail spark up at the name. 'Now, let's go and have lunch and then you can all her.'

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Once they had finished, Will stacked the plates and carried them over to the sink and returning to the table.

‘So, can we see those pictures now?’ Will said, sitting down and Hannibal smiled.

‘You may,’ Hannibal said and opened the folder carefully and removing the first picture, before carefully passing it to Abigail, who let out a small gasp. Leaning close, Will could see that the picture was of a deer in the woods, the surroundings were frozen. Already he could feel his mind working and he turned away, feeling somehow, voyeuristic.

‘It’s beautiful, Hannibal,’ Will said.

‘I’ve never seen anything like it,’ Abigail said, in awe.

‘And this one is for you, Will,’ Hannibal said, taking out the second picture. Will took the picture carefully, but closed his eyes reflexively once he saw it.

It was a picture of him. It was a physical representation of how Hannibal saw Will…and he hated it; not sure if he wanted to stare at it; take in every single detail or burn it. Will always saw too much; felt too much; wanted too much…more than a person could be expected to handle. What would he see if he saw himself through Hannibal’s eyes?

Looking down at the picture again, Will could see that the ‘Will’ in the picture wasn’t looking at the audience, but rather, looking beyond, as though seeing more and less than could have otherwise been seen. The sight haunted that ‘Will’ and the ‘Will’ he saw looked tired and afraid, but there was strength there. The man in that picture was raw, but that added to his beauty.

It would have taken Hannibal hours.

Will swallowed.

His gaze dragged downwards, noting the table in the picture which held, not one, but two glasses, as though the other person had merely stepped out of sight for a moment. It was a question.

‘Thank you Hannibal,’ Will said, finally, as he was unable to handle looking at it any longer. ‘You are amazing. Now, if you don’t mind, I told Abigail I would let her talk to Marissa.’ Standing up, he fished out his phone and dialing. He didn't have long to wait, before he was hearing Marissa's voice say, 'it took you long enough.'

Will felt a small smile force itself onto his face and said, 'so I take it your mum isn't home right now?'

'Thank God. I thought she would never leave and then that you would never call,' Marissa said and Will wondered if they had been fighting again. 'Then you didn't call and I was

starting to wonder if I would have to call you instead or something.'

'Well, I have called now, but since I know who you really want to be talking to, and Abigail looks like she is about to rip the phone out of hand...'

'***Will***,' Abigail said, sounding delightfully mortified.

'Talk to you later,' Will said and passed Abigail the phone, chuckling it was quickly snatched from him, before leaving the room to get some privacy.

'You are doing a good thing, Will,' Hannibal said, joining him in the kitchen, as Will ran water in the sink to do the washing up. 'I would imagine, despite Abigail's maturity, it would be a great comfort to her to be able to speak to someone familiar and her own age.'

'I hope so, since I didn't exactly get a second opinion before doing it,' Will said, feeling a bit guilty.

'Abigail's pain hurts you as though it were your own,' Hannibal said.

'That seems the way of things. More often burdened by pain than joy,' Will said.

Hannibal was silent for a while after that, as they finished with the dishes, before finally he said, 'Will, for a moment, I would like you to focus on me.'

'On you?' Will said, not sure if Hannibal meant what he thought he did.

'I may not have had the most wonderful past, but I do believe my present is much more... pleasant,' Hannibal said, looking a bit pained at being unable to come up with a better word. 'Now Will, I would like you to feel me.'

With that, Hannibal leaned close and pressed his warm, soft mouth to Will's. The sensation disorientated Will and it took a moment for Will to remember that he was asked to do something other than just return the kiss and he opened his eyes. Studying Hannibal's features, he allowed the other to carry on the kiss, while his mind set drifted. Gradually it began to become anchored to different emotions:

.....joy.....so much joy.....joy that pulses in my blood and fills my bones....I want.....we are not close enough....need to taste....need to feel.....so beautiful....mine.....so clever.....brilliant boy.....no one can touch....he cannot be taken...he needs to see....

Were Hannibal's eyes always so red?

.....I need.....mine....joy....so soft...need....he's just there....I see him....so open....so trusting....mine....he sees me....now?.....no.....too soon.....so alone....beautiful boy....see me....taste me.....my blood.....

BLOOD??

Will pulled away with a gasp, his hand flying to his mouth, instantly recognising the sticky feel of blood, though it wasn't his own, as he couldn't feel any corresponding injury or pain.

A quick glance to Hannibal's mouth revealed the damage and Will winced.

Hannibal... didn't seem all that bothered by it actually, which felt almost as strange as everything else at that moment. He even seemed pleased about it and Will wondered if it was some alpha thing or if it was just a Hannibal thing, still he fished a handkerchief out of his pocket and starting dabbing at the wound. As the cloth was dry, it wasn't removing the spot of blood that had already stuck to his skin. That blood was darkening to a shade which reminded Will of the colour Hannibal's eyes had appeared moments before and he forced his eyes away.

'Just a minute,' Will said, taking the handkerchief and ran a corner of the fabric under some water. After wringing it out so that it wasn't dripping, Will handed it back, his eyes away from Hannibal, not knowing if he really wanted to see what was there.

'Will, I am curious, have you ever tried anything like that before?' Hannibal said.

'The mind thing or the...biting thing?' Will said, trying to keep his voice steady. When no answer was forthcoming, Will said, 'neither, since you are so curious. Most people don't really like my mind thing too much, let alone invite me into their head. As, for the other thing, most partners I have been with haven't exactly gone for that type of thing, and I didn't think I did either.'

'I find it curious that you find it easier to talk about being in another person's headspace than it is to admit that you bit me; considering your usual aversion to the topic,' Hannibal said and he truly only did sound curious, rather than judgmental as Will would have expected anyone would have been after that.

'I'm really sorry about that,' Will said, walking over to the sink to grab his glass from earlier.

'Don't be. It was one of the possibilities I had considered before I asked you to do what you did,' Hannibal said. Filling his glass with water, Will took a sip to wash the taste of blood out of his mouth.

Setting the glass down, Will said, 'Hannibal...'

Fortunately he was saved from having to say anything more as Abigail returned a bright grin on her face, which faltered when she saw the look on Will's face. Handing Will the phone, she said, 'what happened?'

'Nothing for you to be concerned about,' Hannibal said smoothly. 'How was Marissa?'

'She was great,' Abigail said, her voice rising happily. 'I mean, she didn't like that her mum came home early, obviously, but she doesn't hate me. She even mentioned that she wants to move out of home as soon as she is able to.'

'Moving out of home can be a difficult step,' Hannibal said and Abigail nodded.

'Yeah, she knows that and she has been saving up for a while, since she wanted to get an apprenticeship somewhere, rather than go to university or college,' Abigail said, seeming rather proud of her friend.

'What is she interested in?' Will said.

'Electrical engineering, I think,' Abigail said. 'She's actually a bit like a firefly sometimes.'

'How so?' Hannibal said.

'Well, when I would stay at her place, I would usually sleep on the mattress on the floor in her room,' Abigail said. 'Anyway, we would turn out the light so I could go to sleep, but she would usually be on her phone or her iPod for ages and the backlight would light her up, like a firefly.'

Alcohol

The phone is ringing.

That was the first bleary thought that came to Will's head as his mind dragged itself out of sleep. It had been the most restful night sleep he had in a few days, so he was reluctant to abandon it quite so quickly. Still, he reached out his hand and fumbled for it, barely remembering to turn his head so that he didn't sound completely muffled.

'Hello.'

'Sorry, did I wake you up?' the person said, and it took a moment to realise it was Beverly speaking.

'Uhm, yeah. It's okay though. I take it you need something?' Will said, deciding to sit up, since it was too hard to concentrate lying down as he was.

'Well, I was calling to see if you would be okay to come by today, to talk about the mushroom guy,' Beverly said, and Will looked over at the latest addition to his little family. He had been able to pick up Winston the day before and he wasn't sure how he would handle being left alone quite so soon.

'Sure,' Will said, checking the time. 'I'll probably be a couple of hours, but I'll be in as soon as I can.'

'So how are things going with...?' Beverly started, a teasing note in her voice.

'Goodbye Beverly,' Will said, and hung up before she could respond.

***

The three of them were waiting for him when he arrived. He never particularly liked this area of the building, the white was too bright and he found himself reaching for his bottle of aspirin as a headache started to take hold. He would have to pick up some more on the way home, as he had been going through them like they were candy.

'Bout time you showed up,' Beverly said, coming over to greet him. 'You know it isn't polite to hang up on someone when they're talking to you.'

'Yeah, well, someone was being nosey,' Will said, noting Beverly's grin. 'So, what have we got?'

'As we suspected, the bodies were soaked in a highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop,' Jimmy said. 'Perfect for growing mushrooms and other

fungi.'

'Wasn't the mushrooms,' Brian said, leaning against the autopsy table. 'What killed all of them was kidney failure.'

Will thought on this as Zeller covered the body. He had suspected that the bags would have had something to do with how each of the victims died and this just confirmed it. From behind him, Will heard the door open and a man walked in. He was tall, thin, with olive skin, dark wavy hair and a ready grin.

'Miro, I thought you said you were going to be here ages ago. What took you?' Beverly said, grinning as she took the I.V. bags off him. For some reason the man's name nagged at Will and he wondered if he had met him before.

'You can blame my mum for that. I told her that I would get something on the way to work, but she wouldn't hear of it,' Miro said, reaching a hand up scratch the back of his neck.

'Good old Nana,' Jimmy said with a fond smile.

'You call her Nana? She's barely older than you,' Bryan said and suddenly the name clicked.

'Oh, you're Nadia's son,' Will said, not fully intending to say it aloud. When everyone's attention turned to him, he added, 'I met her at the last crime scene.'

'Oh, yeah, I think she mentioned you,' Miro said, his head tilting to the side as he studied Will. 'Little bird.'

'Uh, yeah,' Will said, not really liking that Nadia had spoken to someone about his moment of weakness.

'Do you have a name, or am I going to have to keep calling you little bird?' Miro said smiling and Will was starting to see the family resemblance clearer now that it had been pointed out.

'Will Graham,' Will said, walking over to shake Miro's hand. As he did he caught a whiff of beta scent. Beverly laughed.

'Little bird, huh? Well Bryan got cub and I think Jimmy got beaver and apparently I'm otter,' Beverly said. 'Don't have a clue how she picks the names out though.'

'I think everyone has been asking that question,' Miro said. 'So, you were waiting on the results? Not particularly interesting, just dextrose.'

'He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after the circulatory systems broke down,' Beverly said.

'Force-feeding them sugar water,' Will said, as that solution became its own problem.

'You know you loves sugar water? Mushrooms. The crave it,' Jimmy said, before adding, 'as much as a mushroom can crave anything.'

'Recovering alcoholics also crave sugar,' Bryan said, sparing a quick glance to Jimmy. 'Don't take that personally.'

'I'm not recovering,' Jimmy said, as though he had been jabbed like that dozens of times before.

'Feed sugar to fungus in your body, the fungus makes alcohol. It's like friends helping friends really,' Bryan said, but something about that explanation didn't sit right with Will. It was close though.

'Is someone preying on recovering alcoholics?' Jimmy said curiously. 'Other than themselves?'

Will shook his head. 'Alcoholics are the only ones with compromised endocrine systems. They all died of kidney failure? Death by diabetic ketoacidosis.' It was neat. Almost elegant and it answered everything.

'And the little bird takes to the sky,' Miro said with a grin.

'Did you know they were diabetics?' Beverly said to Brian who looked annoyed.

'We don't know they were diabetics,' Brian said.

'They were all diabetics,' Will said, sure of himself now as the dark spots in his 'vision' beginning to recede now, allowing him to see clearly. 'He induces a come and put them into the ground.'

'How is he inducing the comas?' Beverly said, sounding amused.

'He changes their medication. He's a doctor or maybe a pharmacist or works somewhere in medical services,' Will said, feeling himself becoming agitated as it all came together.

'He buries them, feeds them sugar to keep them alive long enough for the circulatory systems to soak it up,' Beverly said, before Jimmy added, 'so he can feed the mushrooms.'

'We dug up his mushroom garden,' Brian said, as though realising for the first time that digging up the bodies wouldn't have stopped the killer they were hunting.

Taking off his glasses, Will rubbed his eyes and said, 'he'll want to grow a new one.'

'So I've heard he is looking for connections?' Miro said. 'Well, he certainly gets points for creativity.'

'Do you want to tell Jack what we've worked out?' Beverly said, but Will shook his head.

'Nah, just let me know if you need me, or when you catch him,' Will said, allowing his body language to become closed off.

'Okay then, cya Will,' Beverly said and Will turned to leave.

'Goodbye little bird,' Miro said.

***

At 11:45 PM, Will received a text.

We got him. His name is Eldon Stammets. Caught him with someone in the boot of his car. Good work Will. B

Pauses

'Ah, Will, please come in.'

Will tried to give a small smile to Hannibal as he passed, though he probably failed. 'Good evening, Hannibal.'

'So, I have heard they have caught our farmer,' Hannibal said, walking over to his usual seat and sitting down.

'Yeah, though you probably know about as much as I do about what happened,' Will said, finding his eyes landing on a black stag statue. It was very...compelling and he moved closer to get a better look.

'I see. So I take it that Jack did not invite you to be a part of the arrest,' Hannibal said and it wasn't really a question, but Will found himself answering anyway.

'They already have me seeing you once a week, and that's just so that I can do some profile work,' Will said bitterly. 'Can you imagine what I would have to do in order for them to actually allow me back into the field?'

'It hurts you that your biology constrains you from living the life you choose,' Hannibal said, causing Will to laugh.

'My ***biology*** isn't what's constraining me, Doctor Lecter,' Will said, turning around to bring Hannibal back into his line of vision.

'No, it is not and I am sure, with you training you would have been perfectly capable of dealing with the situation that occurred last night,' Hannibal said. 'However, you would not have been the first to blame their biology for the faults of society.'

'What about you? Are you happy being an alpha?' Will said, needing to get the focus off himself for a moment.

'I am who I am,' Hannibal said simply. 'But if you are asking if I would wish myself otherwise, I would not.'

'I guess you wouldn't,' Will said, not really knowing what else to say to that. Standing up, Hannibal walked over to his desk to lean against it, before his eyes returned to Will like weight.

'Will, I am curious to know, with your insight, how do you perceive alphas?' Hannibal said and Will froze. It wasn't like he hadn't spoken about it before, but it was a lot easier to talk to a beta or another omega, than it was to actually talk to an alpha, who was also his boyfriend.

'In what context?' Will said. 'As friends, bosses, sexual partners, political leaders...killers?'

'Which ever you wish,' Hannibal said. 'Though I am curious as to the changes you experience to your mindset when you reconstruct their thinking.'

'It's not all that different from any other the other killers I think about,' Will said, sighing. 'In the end it is usually for some sort of self-gratification, usually involving some drive to gain power or dominance.'

'And how about romantically, sexually?' Hannibal said causing Will to sputter a bit at the abruptness of the question.

'Excuse me, but are you abusing you position to ask me if I think you're a good boyfriend?' Will said, eye brows raised.

'...And if I am?' Hannibal said, as though trying to sound cautious, but failing terribly due to the tiny smile playing at his lips.

'Hmmm, well I would have to think on that one,' Will said, his hands sliding into his pockets as he walked closer to Hannibal. 'Honestly, I haven't had the greatest experience with alphas, as they tend to be only after one thing. I know I was probably looking in the wrong places, but... well it didn't help my self-confidence any. I have had a couple of short term relationships. My longer ones tended to be with betas, but after a while they all found me a little disorientating and they couldn't work out why exactly.'

'And you think you know?' Hannibal said.

'Not for certain, but I suspect it is because when I get absorbed in a conversation or I spend a lot of time with someone, I tend to pick up some of their patterns, like walking or talking,' Will said, wondering if he was trying to get Hannibal to change his mind about him or to simply alert him to what he was in for by starting a relationship with him. 'For example, I dated this one beta, Jessica, for about three months and it wasn't till we broke up that I realised I had picked up her habit of calling people darlin'. Took me a lot longer to break the habit than it took me to pick it up.'

'I wonder what you will pick up from me,' Hannibal said, and he sounded rather pleased about the concept, which Will wasn't really sure how to deal with. He had already gotten some idea that his boyfriend was something of a narcissist, however it was something altogether to see how that impacted on their relationship and Hannibal's view of Will. When Hannibal had told him that he was enough, was it only because he had the potential to be what Hannibal wanted? Reflections of himself in another.

'I wonder,' Will said, noting Hannibal's slight moment of tension. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath, held it... and then let it go. 'Look, I'm sorry. It's a touchy subject for me and most people don't take it as well as you have. I don't know how to deal with that.'

'No apology needed, though it is appreciated,' Hannibal said, which Will found to be something of a contradiction, but said nothing. 'Now, I recall you saying you were doing some research for a paper and I know I said that you could borrow some of my books, and you may still, but I may be able to point you in the right direction if you are amenable to some assistance?'

'Sure,' Will said, accepting the olive branch as intended.

***

By the time they had arrived at Hannibal's home for dinner, the tension between them had eased. After that, it was easy to sit there in Hannibal's dining room and listen to him talk about his days at Hopkins, which then changed into Will telling his own stories about his time in homicide.

Unlike his time at school, he had eventually decided to skip work on the worst days of his heat, since it seemed the only time that the other officers seemed to actually notice he was an omega and not a beta or alpha. For some reason his heat seemed to make them nervous around him when they could no longer pretend that he wasn't what he was.

Hannibal had seemed rather amused at that observation, though Will decided not to ask for an explanation as to why that was.

'So, Will, what are your plans once you have finished assisting the FBI catch those serial killers,' Hannibal said, as he stacked the plates to carry into the kitchen to wash.

'I don't know. I haven't really thought about it,' Will said, collecting some of the dishes that remained and following Hannibal. 'I mean, it's possible that Jack might want me to continue to assist them, after all, he didn't hesitate to ask me to help with Stammets.'

'Well, I am curious as to whether you would be interested in co-authoring a paper with me? And if that goes well, we could consider more in the future,' Hannibal said and ***wow***. Will put down the plates and leant against the bench behind him, already lost to thought.

This was one hell of an offer. On one hand, Hannibal's publications were widely respected in psychiatric circles and to be noted, not as an assistant, but co-author, would help a great deal in boosting Will's credibility. Not that it really needed it. On the other hand, they were a lot of time and could possibly require Will to be more social than he was really used to.

'Can I think about it?' Will said, turning his attention back to Hannibal. 'As I said before, I haven't really thought about what I will be doing after... then there is Jack.'

'I understand, though if I may, I would like to draw up some ideas to run by you,' Hannibal said and Will gave a small smile.

'You are a confident one, aren't you,' Will said, teasing. 'Okay then, but don't be getting too excited.'

Returning Will's smile, Hannibal stepped closer and said, 'I don't know, you make that rather difficult.'

'So do you,' Will said, before stepping closer and kissing Hannibal.

Write

Chapter Notes

Short chapter. Sorry.

Dahmer in Wonderland

BY FREDDIE LOUNDS- POSTED ON FEBRUARY 27, 2015

POSTED IN: TATTLE CRIME EXCLUSIVES

My dear Tattlers, I have missed you all and I have greatly appreciated all your messages of support, however, the world keeps spinning and there is no time to celebrate my triumphant return. Instead, I must bring you news of the worst of tragedies. Merely 45 minutes ago, word reached my ears of police at a near by elementary school.

Due to its small size and relative isolation, nothing abnormal was noticed until the parents went to pick up their children from school. Even then, from outside the school, everything appeared completely normal and they could hear the sounds of their darling children laughing and playing. At least until they stepped onto the grounds.

By all accounts, it was a ghost town.

The sounds they could hear were playing through the speakers located around the school. It wasn't until they reached the gymnasium that they were to reveal the grim truth of what had occurred. This is when the police were called and I joined them soon after.

There is no word yet as to how many have been killed, though there has been no word of any survivors. To listen to the wails of bereaved parents... it is nearly more than I can bear. So, it is with a heavy heart that I bring you this news, my dear Tattlers, and I shall ensure to keep you up to date with all the latest news as it happens.

Please, stay safe. I love you all.

Disaster

Chapter Notes

> Originally this chapter was going to be shorter, but I felt a bit bad for delaying the last update, that I extended it a little. I hope everyone read the warnings.

From the moment Will arrived at the school, he was made very conscious of the fact it would be a crime scene he would never forget. Not that he ever forgot any of them, but there were some that stayed with him like an old battle wound. Every so often the chill would set in and cause it to flare up, bringing back all the pain he felt in excruciating detail. This would be another one of them.

If Freddie had reported accurately, the police must have shut off the recording before Will got there, though the scene wasn't quiet. Everywhere he looked there were shell-shocked and heart-broken faces. Some of the parents, who were able to talk, were talking to the officers who were milling around and taking statements.

The smell of vomit was heavy in the air and Will had to wonder if that had been a police officer or a parent, or both. Usually Will never arrived on a crime scene that has so many people around, as serial killers usually chose isolated spots so they wouldn't be disturbed. He hesitated to call these killers that, however, as they still felt more like mass murders than serial killers; but they had taken a massive risk by doing this and it was Will's job to catch them out on it.

Walking through the crowds, Will tried to find a familiar face, before finally giving in and requesting directions to the gymnasium. The officer, a female beta, looked at him suspiciously when he said who he was, probably not expecting an omega, but after a short conversation via walkie-talkie, she finally told him where to go.

It didn't take long, as it was a rather small school, though Will was surprised to see Hannibal out the front waiting for him when he got there. The look of concern was also strange, almost twisted and Hannibal was heading towards him in long, quick strides.

'Will, you should not be here,' Hannibal said and Will frowned, unable to believe what he was hearing.

'Yes I should, Jack called me and...'

'I will speak to Jack once you are gone,' Hannibal said, a little crazed and it dawned on Will that the crime scene had really gotten to Hannibal. 'Please Will, you do not want to see this. You do not want to feel this and carry it around with you like poison in your head.'

'I can't let them get away with this, Hannibal. Not after this,' Will said, trying to be the calm and rational one, though Hannibal's words made him nervous.

'There will be another crime scene, Will...'

'Exactly Hannibal, there will be another crime scene and God knows how many more they will kill if they get away with this again,' Will said, trying to keep his voice moderate, though it was difficult.

'Your well-being matters more to me than...'

Will took Hannibal's face in his hands and kissed him, belatedly hoping that no one else had seen him do that. It was a soft, lingering thing, though it took a moment for Hannibal to respond with barely more than a tremble. Pulling away, Will looked at Hannibal's face carefully, taking in the closed lids and the soft, shuddering breaths.

'Hannibal...'

'I take it there is nothing I can say to convince you to change your mind?' Hannibal said, without looking at him. 'Then go. I will be here waiting for you when you return.'

***

The gymnasium's glass doors were covered over to prevent people from looking in and Will had to push one of the large dark sheets aside in order to enter. The smell struck Will like a blow; made so much worse due to the enclosed space. The room was lit up by dim lights and there was red. He had barely comprehended what he was looking at, when he felt a hand tugging him to look away and he was face-to-face with Beverly.

'Hey Will,' Beverly said, her voice sombre. 'Look, you really don't want to be here. I don't want to be here, but you... This is bad, Will, really bad. We won't blame you if you want to back out. I know how hard this is for you. Jack thinks this is just an objective reconstruction of thinking, like you're Sherlock Holmes or something, but you’re not. You're Will Graham and I'm worried about you.'

'Thanks, Beverly,' Will said, surprised by her admission. 'But I've already spoken to Hannibal. He didn't even want me to step through the door.'

'Then why did you?' Beverly said, a little frustrated now. 'He's supposed to help you and if he thinks you shouldn't be here, then maybe you shouldn't be.'

'And what happens the next time I get a phone call, or read the news, and find out that more have died, maybe even more than this, because I chose not to look?' Will said, needing for Beverly to understand that he wouldn't be able to handle the guilt, the constant 'what ifs' buzzing around in his head.

'Then it's on us, not you,' Beverly said, firmly. 'You help us. If we fail, ***we*** fail, not you.'

'I'm sorry, but I have to do this,' Will said, moving around Beverly.

'Please, Will?' Beverly said and Will paused, not used to anyone care so much about him and wondering how that happened. Turning around, Beverly must have seen his determination as Hannibal had. '***Fuck***. Alright Graham, you do this and I am staying at your house tonight. I don't care if I have to sleep on the floor with the dogs; you are not allowed to be alone after this shit.'

Will just nodded and went to find Jack.

***

Now that Will was free of Beverly, he took a moment to take in the scene as he walked. Like the previous crime scene, the bodies were posed in various positions, but this time they had also been dressed up like dolls. Another difference was that only a small number of the bodies had been mutilated, rather than all of them.

'Will, I see you have talked to Beverly,' Jack said, when Will got closer.

'Yeah, and Hannibal too,' Will said, taking out the fresh bottle of aspirin and swallowing a couple.

'I've seen you do that a lot lately,' Jack said, nodding to the bottle. 'You been getting headaches?'

'Yeah. Though it's probably nothing,' Will said, deciding not to tell Jack that the tablets had started to become as effective sugar tablets.

'This. What we do. Can weaken your immune system if you allow it,' Jack said and Will thought he could detect some annoyance.

'If I allow it?' Will said.

'Keep this in perspective. Keep yourself in perspective,' Jack said, as though that hadn't been what Will had been trying to do the entire time. 'What you do is take whatever evidence there is and extrapolate. You reconstruct the ***thinking*** of a killer, not think you are a killer.' Will just nodded, knowing that whatever he could say to that would probably bite him later and he had a crime scene to look at.

'Good. Now, from what I have been told, all the wounds inflicted on bodies were post mortem and all the victims likely died of suffocation, due to the gas they inhaled. The gas is believed to be an incredibly strong muscle relaxant, though Miro is going to need to test it to confirm that,' Jack said.

'Was there an assembly today or something? How did they get everyone into the gymnasium?' Will said, which earned a frown from Jack.

'I had wondered the same thing, but none of the parents had heard anything about a special assembly and the weekly assembly is held on a Monday morning,' Jack said.

'Could one of the teachers, or even the principle have been in on this?' Will said.

'If they were, they didn't live to talk about it. All the teachers and other staff members have been accounted for,' Jack said and Will nodded, deciding not to discard that thought. Seeing that Will was ready, Jack turned to look at the crime scene and yelled, 'everyone, finish up what you are doing, we are taking ten.' As the crime scene cleared, Jack said, 'come find me when you're done,' and left.

Fatality

Chapter Notes

> I hope everyone has read the warnings, as this chapter concerns the death of multiple children.

Finally the room cleared and Will started walking, each step winding his nerves tighter, his senses sharper. Now was time for him to see; to absorb and he walked around the crime scene, trying to take it in the way a camera would; transferring all the details. The gym wasn't very large, only big enough for a couple of basketball courts. The walls were white and needed a new coat of paint. The change rooms were located near the entrance and across from them was the store room for the equipment.

Then there were the bodies.

There was probably upwards of forty of them, splayed around in different poses, with one common theme: Alice in Wonderland.

Will had thought, or at least hoped, when he had read that title that Freddie had been playing dramatic, but the caterpillar, the rabbit, the Queen of Hearts and even the oyster babies were all there. As Will walked, he had to be careful where he stepped to stay out of the few massive puddles of blood, though someone had thought to set up small bridges over the worst of it to travel over.

Will saw a small, dark haired girl in a blue dress and wondered if that was supposed to be Alice. Then another girl with an 'A' name sprung to mind and Will forced the thoughts down. Most of the bodies were unharmed, with the exception of being dead and were simply clothed and staged. The mottled, white faces and vacant eyes, however, betrayed the fact that this was not merely children at play. It was the 'oyster babies' that caused the majority of the smell and in the centre was an adult, who clearly had more attention than most of the others, with 'Ripper' written across his forehead. Right in front of them was the Queen of Hearts.

Despite the red of her dress, large sections were stained darker with blood down the front of her dress. A quick glance at her sceptre told Will all he needed to know about the reason for that, as her heart was the main ornament. Something didn't seem right about her though, and he realised that, unlike the others, the killers had taken the time to wipe down her face, even applying some make up. She was special somehow.

After two more laps around the gym, Will was ready. The pendulum swung behind his eyes and time reversed.

***

The stage has been set for our grandest performance yet... ***But it 's not perfect*** *... You have driven us to this by ignoring us. We deserve fear and one way or another we will take it...****it didn't have to be this way****... This blood is on your hands...****she's still in there****...*

*...We are dragging you, Ripper, into Wonderland, where nothing is as it seems and anything is possible...****we weren't supposed to be this****... You will be helpless before us ...****she was one of us****...*

*...Once everyone is inside, we seal the exits, the doors are reinforced already. None shall escape...****please****...We have exploited a couple of weaknesses somewhere in the exterior of the building where the canisters can come through...****forgive us****...*

*...You have served us well, our queen and we honour you for that, but this is a sacrifice we had to make to achieve our end...****we didn't need to do this****... The Ripper must be brought down in all ways, for he is nothing and we are all...*

*...We can hear the screams...****oh God, I can hear her****... They give us power...****please, let this just stop****...We are better. We are Gods and as Gods we take the air from their lungs...*

*...****Why didn't you just listen?****...We wanted you by our side, but you had to be selfish didn't you?...****Why didn't you just listen?****...*

***

Will tore himself away. His hands were shaking. He was shaking. He was overwhelmed. His legs barely carried him to the bathroom, where he lost the contents of his stomach and left him collapsed on the floor.

This had never happened to him before. *Why is this happening now?* Fortunately everything had come up too easily to leave the burning taste of bile, but Will still stumbled to his feet to wash his mouth out at the sink. He had to grip the basin to stay upright and he soon found his free hand scooping up water to wash his face and neck, just to cool down.

Bang!

Will jumped, only to realise that it had just been the door. Looking up in the mirror, he caught Beverly calling out to Jack outside; to tell him she had found Will. As though feeling his gaze, Beverly turned around to meet his eyes in the mirror.

'Sorry I scared you. Are you okay? You kind of look like shit?' Beverly said and Will felt like she was being generous, considering the sweat he could feel beading at his brow. 'Do you

want me to get Hannibal?' That turned out to be unnecessary, as she had barely spoken the words when the man himself came through the door, though with more care that Beverly had.

'Will, Jack told me where you were and I knew I had to come to you,' Hannibal said, walking past Beverly and taking one of Will's wrists in hand and pressing his fingers to the pulse point. 'Your pulse is erratic and you are overheated. I take it you were recently ill?' Will nodded, turning around fully to face them.

'Last time they were a single unit, working with a common goal, but this time... I don't know. Something has divided them and suddenly my mind was opened to all these different voices and feelings,' Will said, not able to find the right words he needed. 'It was overwhelming...Like too many people, all trying to talk at the same time.'

'Do you think you're able to tell Jack what you saw, or do you want to call him later?' Beverly said, looking like she wanted to come closer, but not sure if Will would be okay with that.

'I should probably tell him now so that he can start looking,' Will said, rubbing his eyes.

'Wait, you mean you have found something?' Beverly said, a bit excited and Will just nodded. Time to face Jack.

***

'So, Beverly tells me you were in the bathroom?' Jack said, his face set in a look of stern impatience. 'Do I need to be concerned about you, Will?

'No,' Will said. 'I just got a little bit overwhelmed is all.'

'Look, if you can't handle this crime scene, then just tell me and go. We don't need people here who can't do their jobs,' Jack said and Will felt himself bristle and the assumptions.

'I can handle it, but what I couldn't handle was trying to detangle the thought processes of two, maybe more, individual's minds from each other,' Will said, and waved his hand at the crime scene. 'This is messy, Jack. The first crime scene, they worked together to achieve a common goal, but now...now they are falling apart and it will be because of this that we can catch them.'

'Okay, I'm listening,' Jack said, crossing his arms.

'All you really need to do is to find the identity of the Queen of Hearts. The 'Ripper' is probably the school counsellor or something... that isn't important,' Will said, regaining a bit of his lost energy. 'I was right earlier; there will be some connection between the Queen of Hearts and the killers. She probably even worked with them on the previous crime scenes, but the others went over her head with this one. She wasn't prepared to do what was deemed necessary and so they killed her for it. She probably even tried to betray them at some point. There was dissension over this issue, though, one of them didn't want to go through with it.'

'Will, the Queen of Hearts; she is the school principal, Dana Carter,' Jack said, his eyes drifting in thought. 'Which means she would have the authority to call a school-wide assembly at a moment's notice.'

'As for the use of the school, they did it just because they felt they weren't getting enough attention,' Will said. 'Because we tried to prevent mass panic, by stifling the news, they decided to up the ante and this was the result.'

'Good work, Will. I will let you know if I hear anything,' Jack said, before walking off to talk to Zeller and Price, who looked like they were preparing to pack up the bodies.

'Hey, Will,' Beverly said, from beside him. 'I better go and help the others, but I will see you tonight, okay? Geez I haven't had a sleep over since I was in my last year of uni. Need me to bring anything?'

'Something to sleep on, or you'll actually be sleeping on the floor with the dogs,' Will said, causing Beverly to pout.

'You're no fun, Graham,' Beverly said. 'I'll bring over some DVDs and some beers, how about that?'

'Fine,' Will said, trying to sound annoyed, but failing and then it was just him and Hannibal.

'It seems like you have found a good friend in Miss Katz,' Hannibal said, sounding approving. 'Though, I cannot say I will not envy her the chance to stay at your home.'

'Trust me, you do not want to sleep at my house,' Will said, though he couldn't help but feel rather flattered. 'My bed is terrible and I ***really*** couldn't have you sleeping on the floor. I also have nightmares.'

'You say that as though you are the only one,' Hannibal said with a small smile. 'Still, I imagine I will have plenty of time to convince you to change your mind.'

'You might,' Will said, but he found himself smiling a little in return and things were a little bit closer to being okay.

Languid

Chapter Notes

> This chapter was going to be longer, but I decided not to contaminate the fluff. I just hope that Will and Beverly aren't too OOC, but I had way to much fun with this chapter to change it. Enjoy.

Will's dogs were all over Beverly when she arrived and she won bonus points by bringing a couple of bags of treats.

'I had no idea how many you had,' Beverly said, handing the remaining bag to Will. 'Jack thought you had six, but Alana mentioned a seventh.'

'Thanks for those,' Will said. 'Do you want to come in and have a drink, or bring your things in first?'

'I think I'll grab my stuff,' Beverly said, smiling. 'Give me a hand?'

'Sure,' Will said, wondering just how much Beverly brought. As it turned out, though, she only really needed help to bring in the pack of beers.

'Where's your room?' Beverly said, carrying her things up the steps. Apparently one of the bags she was carrying held an inflatable mattress, though he would have to see it to believe it.

'You can have the spare room, it's right next door,' Will said, but Beverly shook her head.

'No way. Go hard or go home. We are having a full out, nail painting, junk food eating, movie watching, sleepover,' Beverly said, causing Will to blanch. 'And that means I am sleeping on the floor in your room.'

'Nail painting?' Will said, though he really didn't want to ask and Beverly pulled out a cube of different coloured nail polishes from her clothes bag.

'I got this for Christmas,' Beverly said and for a long moment Will considered throwing her out of the house in a bid to save what was left of his sanity. It seemed as though that was a lost cause, however, as he found himself leading her to drop off her things in his room.

'So, can you get take-out all the way out here?' Beverly said when she put her things down on the floor.

'I have a couple of frozen pizzas that I can throw in the oven?' Will said, remembering his recent shopping trip.

'How are you on the ice-cream front?' Beverly said, but Will shook his head. 'Chocolate?' Another shake. 'Damn, good thing I brought popcorn, though you better have butter and not just that margarine stuff.'

'That, I think, I might actually have,' Will said and Beverly chucked him the bag of corn kernels. 'I'll get your sheets while you set up.'

***

A few hours later, Will and Beverly were watching another truly terrible movie, that involved vampires and werewolves, and eating popcorn. Beverly had been shocked when she had seen the size of his TV, which wasn't much bigger than his laptop and with worse graphics and had refused to listen to his claims of not watching much TV.

'So Will,' Beverly said, not bothering to pause her work on his toe nails, which were turning an atrocious green colour with every swipe of the brush. 'What's going on between you and Hannibal? I mean, is he your psychiatrist or what?'

'It's unofficial, but Jack needed to tell the higher ups that he wasn't just tossing a weak and helpless omega out into the field,' Will said and Beverly snorted.

'You, weak and helpless? Yeah right,' Beverly said and screwed on the lid of the nail polish. After a moment, Beverly decided on a bright purple nail polish. Putting down Will's first foot, she took hold of the second and returned to painting.

'Yeah, well, not everyone sees it that way,' Will said with a sigh.

'I guess you just can't fix stupid,' Beverly said. 'Anyway, I think he likes you.' Will's eyes shot to Beverly, a little alarmed, though not really knowing why.

'Oh?' Will said, feeling himself flush a little.

'Yeah, and I take it from your reaction that you might like him a little too,' Beverly said, voice teasing. 'I guess the question is now, is he the boyfriend?'

Taking a sip of beer, Will thought on the question, because, well it was one thing to tell Abigail, but to tell someone he worked with? Still, if he was that uncertain about Beverly, she wouldn't be sitting where she was and painting his nails, so he said, 'yeah, he is, though it's only been just over a week.'

'Huh. So what's that like? He seems kind of... reserved. I dunno, there's something odd about that guy,' Beverly said and Will nodded.

'Yeah, I guess. I can't say I really know him all that well yet, but he's intelligent, patient, polite, curious...' Will said, before letting out a sigh and letting his head fall forward. 'But you're right; there is definitely something odd about him.'

As if sensing his mood drop, Beverly said, 'hey, no, that is no reflection on you. You're great. Sure you can be a little weird sometimes, but then I can be too. Besides, for all we know, it could be nothing and he could just be a really polite, reserved, European alpha and you two could fall madly in love and I would be God mother of at least one of your kids.'

'One of my kids?' Will said, not able to believe the conversation had turned into this.

'What can I say? You and Hannibal have the genetic potential to produce some really cute kids,' Beverly said and Will just gave in and laughed.

'So what about you and your boyfriend?' Will said, when he had the breath.

'He's great,' Beverly said, smiling. 'We've been together five months now. He's actually a cop, but I don't think we will be working with him anytime soon.'

'So, is he alpha, beta...?'

'Oh, he's a beta, like me,' Beverly said, with a hint of relief in her voice. 'I mean no offence, but alphas tend to be too much hard work with the whole aggression and rut thing. I've tried dating an omega, one time, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was lacking something. I know, it was probably all in my head and there are a number of successful beta/omega relationships, but I didn't feel like I was enough.'

'I guess people have their preference in that as well, not just was sex the person is,' Will said, shrugging. 'So what's he like?'

'He's kind of a teddy bear and I mean it in the most affectionate way possible, but he could stand to lose some pounds,' Beverly said, leaning over to snatch her phone and showing Will the display picture of her and a dark haired man. He had a kind face, but there was something in his eyes that threw Will off. 'His name is Michael and he loves trains and planes... actually he loves all forms of transportation. His favourite colour is orange and his favourite movie is The Lion King. He's also fairly lactose intolerant, so he decided to go vegan when he was thirteen.'

'He's okay with you continuing to eat meat?' Will said, wondering if this was the first time Beverly had a chance to talk to someone about Michael.

'He doesn't like it, but he respects my decision and I respect his,' Beverly said, taking out a small bottle of green liquid and some tissues. As she set back to work, Will realised it was nail polish remover and she was cleaning around the edges where she had gotten nail polish on his skin.

'What's his opinion on dogs?' Will said, not really sure what he should ask about a person someone else was dating.

'I think he is okay with them,' Beverly said, thinking. 'Well he had better be. After meeting this lot, I think I want one, or maybe two so they can keep each other company.'

'Well, shelters are always looking to rehouse pets, so if you are looking to get one, that's where I would start,' Will said.

'Thanks, I will,' Beverly said, putting aside the tissue and picking up a bottle of neon orange nail polish. 'So, Will, give me a hand?' Before he could put together enough thought to protect his hands, Beverly was taking his right hand anyway. Will looked down at her in horror. 'Go hard or go home. I'm thinking cornflower blue for the other one.'

Panic

Will was standing outside his house, looking in. The lights were on inside and he could see Hannibal and Abigail talking, laughing. He wasn't sure, exactly, what they were doing, but then Abigail looked out of the window, smiling and waving at him.

A bark caused Will to turn and he saw a few of his dogs running after, what appeared to be, a white rabbit in a waist coat. Blinking, Will called his dogs to heel before following after the rabbit. It was fast and soon he found himself sprinting just to catch the barest flash of its tail.

It was for this reason that he didn't see the hole until he was already falling. The world around him became nothing but blackness that felt as though it was seeping in through the pores of his skin.

He was back in the gymnasium.

The walls were covered in bright red roses dripping blood. Laughter filled the air and he realised for the first time that everyone was alive. There was something odd about their skin colouring, but he just smiled and soon he was laughing too.

At the front of the room, the Queen of Hearts stood, waving her heart sceptre around. For a moment he thought he could see it beat as though it was still in her chest. It was then the Queen seemed to notice him and her face became furious.

*Pointing her sceptre at him, she screamed, **'OFF WITH HER HEAD.'***

He looked around for a moment, until he realised that he was the girl he had seen that looked so much like a younger Abigail.

Only, he was Alice.

Of course he was Alice.

He ran.

The roses didn't like that, though, and they shot out to bind him, their thorns digging into his skin. Suddenly Abigail was there and she was crying as she tugged on his arm.

'Will, you have to help me. They're coming to get me. Please Will. Please,' Abigail said, desperately trying to pull him free.

'Of course, Abigail,' Will said, a little breathless now, but he would promise her anything, if he could just keep her safe. 'Whatever you need.'

Finally he was pulled free and they started running towards the door again, though this time Will wasn't sure what he was running from, only that he couldn't look back, he just couldn't.

The floor became thorns and he could feel his feet begin to bleed with each step, but he kept going.

'Over here,' a voice said, and he turned to see Michelle standing there with the door to the equipment cupboard open. 'The exit is through here.'

***

Will blinked... and then blinked again.

Where am I?

Looking around, he thought he could recognise the road, but he wasn't sure. A flash of light caught his attention and he turned to see headlights were coming closer. Belatedly, he realised he was standing in the middle of the road and he quickly moved to get out of the way; but the car slowed down and he recognised it immediately. Soon it was pulled up beside him and Beverly leaned over to open the passenger door and he climbed in gratefully.

He heard a bark, and Beverly said, 'looks like you had a tag along.' Will turned and saw Winston standing there.

'Yeah, I guess so,' Will said and called Winston to join him in the car, before closing the door. Beverly had her phone out and was calling someone and Will caught mutters of, 'yeah, I found him... Bringing him back now'.

'So, Will,' Beverly said, once she had hung up and put away her phone. 'I guess it’s a good thing I didn't take the guest room after all.'

***

When they arrived, the lights to the house were on and Beverly parked next to an unfamiliar car. Will guessed they were who she had been speaking to on the phone; though he wasn't sure how to feel about the situation he was now in. Will allowed Winston to get out first, having to give him a nudge to get him moving, before climbing out of the car with more steadiness than he had displayed earlier.

He had barely taken a few steps when the porch light came on and the door was opened to reveal Nadia. She was dressed in a lovely flowery dress and she was all but wringing her hands with worry from what Will could see. She let out a relieved breath when she saw him. He approached cautiously, but that didn't allow him to avoid the crushing hug he received when he was close enough.

'Oh my word, Little Bird, you gave me such a fright,' Nadia said, stroking his hair. Will couldn't bring himself to move. Physical contact wasn't something he had ever really had to deal with, outside of romantic or sexual situations, so he wasn't really sure how to break away without hurting her feelings.

'I'm fine, Na-Nana,' Will said, the word shifting mid syllables when Nadia gave an annoyed look. 'What are you doing out here anyway?'

'Our darling Bev here called me when you wandered off, to help find you,' Nadia said, drawing back, before leading Will inside. 'You really scared her, hun. Miro was looking too, but he has to be up early tomorrow, so I promised to let him know how you are once I checked in on you.'

'Sorry,' Will said, face a little flushed now. 'This hasn't happened before, so I have no idea...'

'You've been getting headaches a lot too, haven't you Little Bird? Have you been feeling a bit hot lately?' Nadia said, though her hand was coming up to test his temperature anyway. 'You are a little warm.'

'I tend to run hot,' Will said. 'Especially when I am close to, you know...'

'Well, okay then, but I will be keeping an eye on you,' Nadia said and Will noticed Beverly's apologetic expression, but it smoothed out before Nadia could see. 'Now let me have a look at those feet of yours.'

'It's okay, I will clean them myself in a minute,' Will said, only then remembering they were hurt.

'Nonsense, this will only take a minute,' Nadia said. 'Now sit down and tell me where you keep your buckets, towels and first aid supplies.' Giving in, Will gave her the directions and she left to fetch the supplies.

'I am ***so*** sorry, Will,' Beverly said, once Nadia was out of earshot. 'I didn't know who else to call and she means well.' Will gave her a small smile and then Nadia was back, filling the bucket under the sink with water.

Once she had carried the things over, with Beverly's assistance, Nadia said, 'now give me a foot.'

***

Unsurprisingly, Nadia was very gentle, though it didn't make the antiseptic sting any less and she shushed him for being a baby.

'You know, Bev, people are a lot like bombs,' Nadia said, carefully drying off the first foot, making sure to get in between the toes. 'One minute they are all ready to explode, but with a

little care and a little patience, and they calm right down again.'

'Right,' Beverly said and Will could tell she was trying not to laugh at that. It was only then that Will noticed that she was still in her pyjamas from earlier.

Finally, it looked like Nadia was all done and it didn't seem like Will would be needing stitches or even bandages. 'Anyway, I heard you two were having a sleepover. Gosh, Miro used to love having those when he was a little one. Look, you've even done your nails, though I probably would have chosen different colours.'

'Thank you, Nadia,' Will said, flushing a little.

'Yeah, thanks for helping to look for him,' Beverly said, coming to stand beside Will.

'Well, goodnight kids,' Nadia said and after they had said their goodbyes, she was off.

'So, Will, are you planning to see Hannibal in the next few days?' Beverly said, as they made their way back to Will's room, flipping off light switches as they went. 'I have heard it's even more fun for you.'

'I'll probably see them, yeah, but not for that,' Will said. When this earned him a disbelieving look, Will added, 'it's too soon anyway.'

'Fine, whatever you say,' Beverly said, climbing into bed. 'Try not to go exploring again, okay? You also owe me an awesome breakfast.'

'Will tomato, eggs and bacon do?' Will said, closing his eyes, still not used to the idea that someone was lying just mere feet from him.

'Guess that'll do. Goodnight Will,' Beverly said.

'Goodnight.'

Health

When Will got each of his dogs, he made sure to train each one of them to let him sleep. For the most part, this worked quite well. Unfortunately, he hadn't thought to train his house guest.

'Will? Will. Come on, wakey-wakey. You promised me breakfast,' Beverly said, shaking his shoulder. It was so warm and comfortable in his bed though, and Will let out an unintelligible grunt, which hopefully conveyed, 'go away'.

'I know you're awake, Will,' Beverly said. Will knew he was too, but the longer he was, the less attractive that seemed to be. Still, he knew it pointless to try and avoid her, so he rolled over and sat up.

Immediately he dropped back to the bed, in a desperate hope that it would stop his head from spinning. When it didn't, he shut his eyes, as though returning to the state he was in before might allow for a better restart.

'Will?' Beverly said, more softly this time. 'Hey, are you okay?'

'Just...a bit dizzy,' Will said, hating having to admit his weakness. A moment later he felt Beverly's palm fumble its way across his forehead and the warmth of her palm felt nice against his skin.

'Will, I know you said you run a bit hot, but I don't think anyone is supposed to run this hot,' Beverly said and Will could feel her stand up, as the weight shifted off the bed. 'I'm going to get you some water and then we will try getting you to sit up again. Okay?'

Will just nodded and he heard Beverly leave. Deciding to give sitting up another go, he opened his eyes, trying to ignore the way his ceiling seemed to shift in front of his eyes. Putting his hands down on either side of himself, he pushed himself up into a sitting position. His stomach heaved immediately and his mouth began rapidly producing saliva in a way that could only mean one thing.

Swinging his feet across to put the on the floor, he quickly stood up and nearly planted his face in the floor. His shaking legs caught him at the last second, but he only managed a few steps, before he was on the ground, losing his stomach on the floor. He heard a few of his dogs start moving around and he knew they would be approaching him soon. Worried about him being sick.

'Everyone, stay,' Will said, wiping his mouth. Looking down, he realised what he done and swore. Then swore again. Fortunately, standing was a little easier this time and he made it to the bathroom and washed his mouth out. A moment later, Beverly appeared in the doorway, and he realised she had already dressed for the day and holding a glass of water; a resigned look on her face.

'You know, Graham, your sleepovers suck,' Beverly said and Will managed a dry chuckle.

'Yeah, I guess they do,' Will said, turning around and just sitting on the floor, his back against the cabinets under the sink.

'Here's your water,' Beverly said, crouching down beside him and handing him the glass. She then took his free hand and pressed her fingers to his pulse, her eyes on her watch. 'Your heart rate is rapid too. What symptoms have you noticed?'

'Uh, dizziness, nausea, headaches... and everything is really loud,' Will said, sipping his water.

'You looked really shaken up after the mushroom thing,' Beverly said, sounding deep in thought. 'I didn't want to say anything then, I mean, a dead guy just grabbed you, but was it more than that?'

Will froze, not exactly sure what the correct answer was to something like that. Finally he nodded, deciding to trust Beverly with his secret and said, 'I may have hallucinated for a moment. Hannibal said it was just stress, and there was nothing to be worried about.'

'It might have been, but it's starting to sound like it wasn't,' Beverly said and Will hated the concern in her voice. It reminded him too much of the time when he had pneumonia and his father had sounded exactly the same as Beverly did now. 'I'm going to go and fetch you some clothes and then I am taking you to the doctors.'

Will just closed his eyes, realising it would be easier to just let her have her way and he really didn't feel like arguing with anyone at that moment. It hardly felt like any time till Beverly was back and she crouched down beside him again.

'Now, Will, no bullshit. I see dead bodies most days and none of them have clothes on. Do you need me to help you?' Beverly said and Will wanted to say no, he really did. It was bad enough that Beverly had seen as much as she had already. Still, it couldn't get much worse, so he nodded.

They decided to keep him sitting while they changed his shirt, his sweat causing the shirt to cling to his skin. When it was time to change his underwear and put on his pants, Beverly helped support him, so that he could do most of the work himself. Despite her earlier words, she looked away while he changed his underwear, for which he was grateful for.

'Will...okay for... to lea..gs outside...go?' Beverly said, and Will blinked, not really able to understand what she was trying to say.

'Huh?'

'Can I leave the dogs outside?' Beverly said and Will nodded. 'Okay then. Let's go.'

For a while, they were okay getting along, though Beverly was probably supporting a lot of his weight. Then the darkness started creeping in on the edges of his vision, as well as a rising dread. Desperately, he tried to hold it off and he tugged on Beverly's arm to let him sink to the floor for a bit, while he tried not to pass out. Later, he wasn't sure if he got to the ground in time or if he just fell the rest of the way, as his world cut to black.

***

When he woke, he was in hospital and Hannibal was sitting in the chair beside his bed. A glance down showed Will that Hannibal had taken his hand at some point when he was out, but he decided to leave it for the moment.

'Will, it's good to see you're finally awake.' Hannibal said, his free hand coming up to run through Will's hair. It felt nice.

'How long have I been out for?' Will said, his voice rough from sleep and sickness.

'You passed out on Friday morning and it is now Wednesday,' Hannibal said, and Will found it difficult to work up the energy for shock.

'Do they know what's wrong?' Will said instead.

'Apparently your heat triggered complications in an underlying condition, which is what caused such a rapid decline in your health,' Hannibal said. 'You were diagnosed with an infection, though it wasn't until I arrived the following day that I was able to assist them in locating the source.'

'Why...?'

'I am sure you were probably aware my time was close, otherwise I would have been here sooner,' Hannibal said, seeming mildly embarrassed by the confession. 'With my assistance, however, we learned you have contracted Anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis, which caused swelling on the entire left side of your brain. If it had been left untreated, it would have caused your condition to deteriorate further, causing loss of time, deterioration of spacial cognition, amongst other things.'

'What's happened with my dogs? Are they okay?' Will said, not able to think of things like encephalitis just yet.

'I believe Miss Katz has taken charge with feeding them, though I heard she may have other reasons for wanting to avoid her home right now,' Hannibal said, his face sombre, which worried Will.

'What..?' Will said, frowning.

'I believe I should allow her to tell you,' Hannibal said, closing the subject and Will bit his tongue to keep from prying further. 'Speaking of Miss Katz, I must admit I found this rather curious...' With that, he raised the hand he was holding, bringing Will's painted nails into view.

'Oh,' Will said, suddenly remembering and was glad Hannibal probably hadn't seen his toes as well. 'Beverly was very keen on the whole teen movie sleepover idea and she kind of held

my hands and feet hostage while she terrorised them.

'I see,' Hannibal said, but his impish grin showed that he had no sympathy for Will at all. 'In any case, I believe I should fetch the doctor, who will be overseeing your recovery.' Hannibal stood then and pressed his lips to Will's forehead and again on his cheek. Will closed his eyes, savouring the contact and when he opened his eyes, Hannibal was gone.

***

When the doctor arrived, Will was made to sit through a number of tests; checking his eye dilation, memory, reflexes, fine motor skills amongst other things. Hannibal then returned for a while longer, this time with a bunch of flowers to replace the ones that he had brought a few days before. He also had a small plush, purple bear, which he said was from Abigail. After an hour he had to leave again, but he promised to return in a few days with Abigail.

Lies

Chapter Notes

> Hi all, before you get into the next chapter, I have to inform you that I am running out of pre-written chapters and I have a very busy few weeks ahead of me with uni and assessment. That said, I am not giving up on this story, but if after the next couple of chapters I don't update for a while, that is the reason. I do have the rest of this story planned out and wow is it going to be long, (at least 55 chapters) so I should be able to write the chapters easily enough when I have the time.

It was the second day of being conscious and already Will was finding the most exciting time of the day was meal time. It wasn't that he enjoyed the meals, as he had yet to properly regain his appetite, but it was something of a game to try and work out what food he was being given.

Frequently, Will found his mind drift and it was those times that the hustle and bustle of the hospital drew his gaze. The sadness that permeated the building hadn't shifted from the first time he had been in a hospital. Unlike the first time, however, Will had brought something along with him that he didn't have before. Something that made the recycled air and small rooms seem a bit more bearable.

Closing his eyes, Will waded out into the quiet of the stream and went fishing.

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'Will...? Are you awake?'

Slowly the words began to reach him, swimming to him like the fish in the stream. Realising he was wanted, he let the stream go, drifting in darkness, before opening his eyes.

'There you are,' Beverly said, and despite what Hannibal had implied, Will was surprised by the sadness in her eyes. 'How are you doing?'

'Bored. Sick of sleeping all the time,' Will said, pushing himself up so he was sitting.

'This is only your third day awake,' Beverly said, as though Will didn't know that already.

'Hannibal told me I have you to thank for taking care of my dogs,' Will said. 'So, thank you.'

Beverly's face darkened, 'did he tell you anything else?'

'No, he said that you should be the one to tell me... or not to tell me. It's up to you,' Will said and Beverly sighed, before sitting down on the side of Will's bed.

'I might as well. You will hear it yourself soon enough,' Beverly said, her fingers playing with the edge of the sheets. 'I've been taken off the case... Well, I chose to discontinue, but I doubt they would have let me continue anyway.' Will stared at her then, taking in her expression, her clothes, her make-up, trying to piece it all together.

Finally he said, 'you lost someone to this case. There's been another crime scene.'

'Yeah, I guess you could call it that, though I don't know if it really counts as a crime,' Beverly said bitterly and for a moment she allowed the stress fractures to bleed through the mask she was wearing. 'I guess I should probably tell you that we have found out who the killers are.'

Will's mouth made an 'O' of surprise for a moment, the pieces clicking together. 'It was...'

'Yeah, it was,' Beverly said, her eyes beginning to shine. 'I am both mourning and trying not to mourn a serial killer, who we were hunting. I was falling in love with a guy who murdered men, women and children, just because they thought it was the best way to send a message and they didn't know how else to do it.'

'What happened?' Will said, reaching a hand out to rest it on Beverly's, stopping the fidgeting.

'Michael was reported as potentially missing a couple of hours after we left the crime scene,' Beverly said, her eyes distant. 'Of course I was upset, but that only made me need to work more. So I did and we ran the DNA of the ‘Queen of Hearts', like you said. The next day we had the results back and you were right, she was in on it. Her real name was Dana Blake and she was one of three children. Apparently she and her brother, Paul, are twin alphas and Michael was their younger brother.'

'What was their connection to the Ripper?' Will said.

'He murdered their father, Anthony, when Dana and Paul were twelve and Michael was ten. From what we have heard, their mum didn't take the news very well and spent most of her pay on alcohol. Died a few years ago from cirrhosis of the liver,' Beverly said.

'Were they abused?' Will said, and Beverly nodded.

'It was never confirmed and nobody ever talked about it, but the signs were there,' Beverly said, and ***God***, Will shouldn't be asking these questions when Beverly was hurting so much, but he knew she would appreciate being treated as fragile and so he wouldn't.

'Beverly, how did he die?' Will said, maybe too bluntly.

'As I said, he went missing, but after we found out the connection, finding him became even more of a priority,' Beverly said, and he could hear her trying to keep her voice even. 'He was

found a day later and...*oh*.'

Carefully managing his various wires, Will finally managed to pull Beverly against him. A moment later, she had her hands fisted in Will's gown and cried.

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Gradually she stopped crying, though the stint had caused a mild case of the hiccups. Her eyeliner and mascara had run a bit and Will leaned over to a side table to fetch her a tissue and handing it to her.

'Damn. I promised myself *hic* I wouldn't do this,' Beverly said and Will could feel her pain and frustration. 'It's just...we were barely able to find enough undamaged tissue to perform a *hic* DNA test. He was broken, Will. His own brother beat him to *hic* death with a baseball bat and then covered him in kero..*hic* kerosene and set him on fire.'

'When did you step down?' Will said, surprised at how informed Beverly was.

'After Dana's DNA test *hic* results came back,' Beverly said. 'Jack made a big fuss, but I think was glad that he wouldn't have to ask me himself. *hic* Bryan and Jimmy keep me in the loop though.'

'How long do you think until Jack shows up? Before or after I leave hospital?' Will said. Beverly actually managed faint smile at that and Will wondered what he had missed.

'He was going to be here yesterday, when he heard you were awake, *hic* but as soon as Nana found out, she put a stop to that,' Beverly said. 'I don't even think you would dare to talk to him the way she did.'

'And how did you happen to hear what she said?' Will said, not sure if he really wanted to know.

'Miro,' Beverly said, her voice dropping conspiratorially. 'He may have placed a device in the vici-*hic*-nity when he so what she was planning. If such a recording was to exist it is possible I could procure you a copy.'

'I could probably do with a laugh,' Will said. 'If such a thing were to exist.'

A knock sounded at the door and a nurse stuck his head in and said, 'I have a delivery for Mister Graham.'

'Sure,' Will said, not sure who would be sending him something. Hannibal, Abigail and Alana had gifted him with flowers and presents already and he wasn't sure who else would be sending him anything. Beverly stood up and walked over to take the flowers, turning the card over to have a look at the message.

She ***froze***.

Will's stomach dropped. There were very few people who would cause Beverly to look like that and he didn't know why any of them would be sending him flowers. Beverly dropped them to the table so fast they nearly fell to the ground in her haste. Reaching over, Will picked up the card, which was made of plain, white cardboard.

Dear Will,

Do you have any comprehension of how lovely you appeared, standing amongst our art work. Truly it was a sight to behold. Despite my actions, I do not believe I am the one you truly wish to catch. Let us meet again for dinner and discuss it further. I do believe we would make an excellent partnership, if past events are to be believed.

Till we meet again.

P

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An officer came by to collect the flowers for evidence an hour later. She didn't know much about the case, but she was able to confirm that Paul had managed to evade them for the time being. It was going to be a very long few days.

Done

As it happened, Will didn't end up seeing Hannibal and Abigail until the day he was to be released. Hannibal had apologised on the phone, stating that the days he was free had not coincided with the days that Abigail was able to spend time out of the facility. As Will waited for them to arrive, however, it did strike him with an odd sense of déjà vu, but this time he was the one waiting for guests, rather than Abigail.

'Good morning, Will,' Hannibal said, walking into the room, Abigail in tow. Abigail seemed oddly withdrawn, though she gave him a small smile.

'Good morning, Hannibal, Abigail,' Will said, standing. 'I'm ready to go, just need to check out.'

'Very good,' Hannibal said and went to lead them back out of the room and towards the administration desk.

Will held Abigail back a bit as they walked, before he leaned in close and said, 'are you okay?'

Abigail blinked, surprised, but said, 'I'm fine. He's just a little intense is all.' Will's eyes tightened a little. Abigail had made a similar comment when she had met Hannibal and it made him wonder what she was seeing that he might not be.

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The drive back to Will's home was quiet. Will could tell there was something weighing on Abigail's mind, but he had a feeling that she didn't want to talk about it in front of Hannibal. Still, he didn't trust himself not to ask about it, so he stayed quiet and Hannibal, as though taking his cue, did the same.

The house was empty when they arrived, though not quiet, as the seven dogs came rushing over to greet them. Abigail immediately crouched down with him to give them pats and Hannibal stood back and watched, as his own hands were carrying the medication Will would need to take.

'Will, this is Winston, isn't it?' Abigail said, sounding brighter than she had when they were at the hospital and Will nodded. 'He's beautiful, how could someone just abandon him like that?'

'Will, I will take your tablets inside,' Hannibal said.

'Oh, thanks,' Will said, an idea sparking. 'Hey, Hannibal, help yourself to a drink while you're in there. I want to go and stretch my legs for a bit and Abigail could probably do with the

exercise as well.'

Hannibal eyes held Will's for a moment and then said, 'very well. I shall see you both shortly.'

When Hannibal was a distance away, Will turned to Abigail and said, 'I get the feeling you want to tell me something.'

'Sorry. I just didn't really feel comfortable talking in front of him,' Abigail said quietly. 'I am so glad you're okay.' Stepping closer, Abigail wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly, which Will returned after a short delay.

'Yeah, I was lucky that Hannibal was there,' Will said, turning his head a bit and breathing in the smell of her shampoo. It was a light, fruity scent and Will wondered if Alana had bought it for her. Pulling away, Abigail wiped her eyes, and turned to start walking. Will soon fell into step with her and waited for her to speak.

Finally she said, 'I got another call from mum a couple of days ago.'

'Oh, how is she doing?' Will said, trying to hide his surprise.

'She's doing okay. She told me she loves me and misses me a lot,' Abigail said, looking down at the ground. In a moment of insight Will could hear her next words before she said them.***'I told her about you.'***

Despite knowing it was coming, Will still didn't know what he should say, now that those words had been spoken. He had known from the beginning that his friendship with Abigail was one many people would find suspicious, but it would be different to hear it from her mother.

'She wants to meet you,' Abigail said, sounding a bit nervous as to how Will would react. 'I said you probably wouldn't want to, but I don't think she understood.'

'It's okay,' Will said, breathing deeply as he thought about the request. 'I'll do it. I mean, it is hardly an unreasonable thing to ask. I spend a fair bit of time with you and she wants to know you're safe.'

'You mean it?' Abigail said, her face lighting up with relief. 'I'll tell Alana to give you the number. She monitored my phone call.'

'Okay,' Will said, unable to help wondering if he made the right decision. 'We should probably head back, since Hannibal will be wondering where we are. When we do, do you want to call Marissa?'

For a moment, Abigail looked torn, but shook her head. 'No, I can call her next time.'

'Okay, but let me know if you change your mind,' Will said. 'How is your group sessions going?'

'Terrible,' Abigail said, pulling a face. 'But at least I only have to go to one a week now, since Alana *finally* saw it wasn't helping me.'

Will opened the door for Abigail when they got to it, then let in the dogs, before he followed them inside. Hannibal was in the kitchen and it looked like he was preparing food for them. It was then that he looked up and smiled at Will, and in that moment, Will was struck by a feeling of such pure affection for the man, that he soon found himself by Hannibal's side and pressing a kiss to his cheek. Hannibal's eyes crinkled at the corners and he tilted his head forward so their foreheads rested against other for a moment.

When Will finally remembered Abigail was there, he stepped back, feeling rather embarrassed by the display. Looking down at what Hannibal was preparing, Will was surprised that he was preparing a few rounds of sandwiches.

'So, Will, I have heard the FBI have located suspects for those mass murders,' Hannibal said, cutting the sandwiches, to arrange on a dinner plate.

'Uh, yeah, they have, though two of them are dead,' Will said, not really wanting to talk about it. Taking the plate, he carried them over to the table, Hannibal trailing behind him.

'Really?' Abigail said, coming over to join them and taking a sandwich. 'They don't really let me read the news, so I hadn't heard.'

'One was the principal at the school where the last mass murder took place and the other was in the police. He was found a few days after his sister,' Will said, not sure if he should mention Michael's connection to Beverly. Still, if anyone would understand how Beverly was feeling, it would be Abigail, so he said, 'my friend, Beverly, she works in forensics at the FBI, she was dating the police officer at the time. They had been together for five months.'

'Is she okay?' Abigail said, her face creasing in concern.

'As well as can be expected, I think,' Will said. 'Though she has taken herself of the case and she was looking after my dogs while I have been in hospital.'

'Does anyone think she was involved?' Abigail said. Will should probably have been expecting the question, given Abigail's history, but it still took him off guard.

'No,' he said finally. 'Or at least, I haven't heard anything.'

Abigail was quiet for a moment, before her eyes caught on something. 'So, Will, how did this happen?' Abigail said, taking up Will's cornflower blue painted hand. Will really didn't know how the nail polish had lasted as long as it had. It was chipped, certainly, but still evidently there and he sighed.

'Beverly decided she wanted to have a sleepover after the last crime scene,' Will said. 'For her that, apparently, includes movies, nail polish, junk food, and gossip.'

'Oh?' Abigail said, her face lighting up. 'How did you handle that?

'Well, when I woke up, during the night, I was a good twenty minutes' walk from my home,' Will said, earning a laugh from Abigail. 'So either she was snoring, or my subconscious decided it would be a good idea to get out before she gave me a complete makeover.'

'So, just where did she sleep anyway?' Abigail said, a little smirk on her face.

'Well, she wanted to have the full teenage girl experience, so she slept on the floor in my room,' Will said, glancing at Hannibal, who was watching him with interest. 'Which turned out to be a good thing, as she was able to find me quickly enough.'

'I guess that's true,' Abigail said, with a frown, looking at Will's other hand. 'She doesn't like to colour co-ordinate though, does she?'

'You should see my feet,' Will said, which made her laugh. For a while, they lapsed into silence, just focusing on the food Hannibal had prepared and Will turned his attention to the dogs, who were playing a short distance away. Winston was fitting in as well as Will had hoped, though he seemed to have formed more of an attachment to Will than the others had, as he was content to just lay beside Will's chair, rather than join in.

'You know, bonding is kind of gross if you think about it,' Abigail said, causing Will to jerk his attention back. 'I mean, you have to eat gel produced near a person's butt. How did people even figure that out anyway?' Will flushed a little at the sudden thought of potentially bonding with Hannibal. Strangely, the images that accompanied that thought weren't as off-putting as they seemed to Abigail.

'I hadn't really thought about it,' Will said, when it didn't seem as though Hannibal would say anything.

'Did you know that betas used to be able to bond too? It wasn't always just alphas and omegas,' Abigail said, her voice growing more confident as she got deeper into the topic. 'Then one day it just stopped happening and now none of them can, but they still have the gland there, even though it doesn't do anything.'

'This is about Marissa, is it not, Abigail?' Hannibal said, causing Abigail to blush.

'No, of course it isn't. It just sucks that Bomega 4-90 costs so much, when betas used to be able to produce that hormone on their own,' Abigail said.

'Weren't you just saying that bonding is gross?' Will said, smiling at the flustered Abigail.

'Well it is,' Abigail said, though it sounded sulkier now.

'Abigail, I think it is about time I took you back. Will needs to rest,' Hannibal said, standing up, which prompted Abigail to follow suit.

'No, Will does not need to rest. Will has been resting for days,' Will said, before registering how childish that sounded.

'Just let me know if you need anything and don't push yourself too hard,' Hannibal said, walking around the table to caress Will's face. 'I shall see you tomorrow.'

'Actually, I was thinking we could possibly skip this week's session. I mean, it's not like I will have anything to talk about,' Will said and Hannibal's face fell.

'That is a shame, as I will be busy for the rest of the week, however, I will just have to make something extra special for next week,' Hannibal said

'You don't have to do that,' Will said, though he knew it was pointless. Standing he led them both over to the door, refusing to accept the sudden tiredness he felt as genuine.

'Of course I do,' Hannibal said, before looking at Abigail. 'Would you not agree, Abigail?'

'He does,' Abigail said, without a hint of hesitation.

'Well, be off you two and I will see you both soon,' Will said, laughing, which was interrupted by the sudden, decadent press of Hannibal's lips against his own, stealing his breath.

'Goodbye, William,' Hannibal said, pulling back, and pressing his hand to Abigail's back to guide her out.

'Goodbye, Will.'

Vehement

Will was starting to find it less and less surprising to have guests in his home, expected or not. Still, after his last conversation with Abigail, Alana's presence at his home was concerning, if anything. Like Will, Alana had never really taken that well to technology, but unlike Will, she then used that as further motivation to confront people in person when she had a problem with them, rather than try and avoid the issue and hope for the best.

Still, it would be rude of him to leave her standing outside and from the way she was standing, he could tell she was prepared to wait as long as it took. It would also be one more person to carry in the groceries, so he started up his car again and drove the short remaining distance of his driveway.

Alana waved to him, once she saw his car and walked over once he had parked again. For a moment, Will pretended he was looking for something in the glove box as he tried to gather his thoughts. It was a futile effort as he really had no thoughts to gather. So, instead, he took a deep breath and opened the door to get out.

'Good afternoon, Will,' Alana said, and she didn't seem upset.

'Alana, this is a surprise,' Will said, climbing out of the car and closing the door behind him.

'You were sick, I wanted to check in on you and see how you were doing,' Alana said, her face full of concern for him. 'That wasn't just some cold you're fighting off. Are you sure you should even be up right now?'

'I'm fine. I have been taking my tablets, drinking plenty of water and getting more sleep than I have since I was a teenager,' Will said, opening the closest back door of his car to grab the bags from the seats. 'Unfortunately, Beverly seems to have eaten half of my food, so I had to make a grocery run.'

'And how is Beverly doing?' Alana said, taking the first bag off him without prompting.

'I'm not sure, I haven't seen her since Friday,' Will said, taking the last two bags, before closing and locking the doors. 'She did seem to be taking it pretty hard though. Apparently they were together for five months.'

'I can't imagine,' Alana said, falling into step with Will as they headed to the door. The dogs seemed to have become aware of the commotion, as they came bounding up to see what Will had brought. 'Do you know if Jack has any leads as to where the brother is?'

'You are probably more in the loop about that than I am,' Will said with a shrug, moving one of the bags over to his other arm so that he could unlock the door to the house. 'Jack didn't visit and Beverly has taken herself off the case.' Leaving the door open, so the light would stream in, Will deposited the bags on the counter and went to open the house up a little.

'So, Abigail came to visit you when you got released,' Alana said, placing her bag on the counter as well and Will sighed.

'I was wondering when you were going to get to that,' Will said, returning to the bags and dividing the contents between the things that would need to be put in the fridge, freezer and cupboard.

'I'm guessing she has asked you about talking to her mother,' Alana said and Will nodded.

'Yeah, she said something about that and that she would talk to you about it at her next session,' Will said, keeping his eyes fixed on his task.

'Will, I hope you know that I mean no disrespect when I tell you that this is a really bad idea,' Alana said. 'Abigail has essentially lost both her parents and the last thing she needs is to try and reproduce those relationships with other people.'

'So, what, you think I am trying to replace her father?' Will said, struggling to keep his voice level.

'What I think is that you are forming a very strong bond with a girl who is feeling very vulnerable right now.' Alana paused and took a deep breath. Will could almost feel her re-evaluating her position and was trying very hard to be patient with her. Finally, Alana said, 'Abigail had very strong, very unhealthy relationship with her father and the ending of that relationship has been, undeniably, traumatic for her. I can't help but worry that she may be trying to manipulate you into replacing what she has lost.'

'She's not,' Will said, but Alana just gave him a sympathetic smile.

'You don't know that, Will,' Alana said, softly. 'She may not even realise she is doing it either. You are one of her only non-clinical bonds right now and she is going to be more dependent on you as a way of coping with that.'

'And you want her to lose that?' Will said, unable to keep the disbelief from colouring his voice.

'The sad truth is, Will, Abigail just isn't ready to be forming ties with anybody right now,' Alana said, her voice low in an attempt to be soothing. 'She just isn't capable of creating the distance needed to form healthy bonds and I am worried if something happens; I don't think she will be able to cope.'

'So this is my fault? What, I'm not stable enough for her?' Will said, the sting of hurt biting at his words. It wasn't like Alana would be the first to say Will needed to be more normal.

'What? No. Will, God...' Alana said and Will felt himself ease a little at the obvious shock in her voice. 'You are not the problem... or at least that isn't a problem.'

'Then what is the problem?' Will said, putting on the kettle and set about the motions for making tea, if only to give him a way to calm down.

'I'm also worried that when Abigail finally gets back out into the real world, she will fall into a pattern of parasitic dependence, rather than trying to find a way to move forward with her life. Despite the time spent trying to work through her problems, Abigail is still very much lost and I think there is a part of her that wants to give up on her future,' Alana said, waving away Will's silent offer for tea.

'Don't you see? That's why I can't just abandon Abigail. She wants to give up because she thinks the world has given up on her. She doesn't think she has a future that is even attainable to her any more,' Will said. 'So what happens? She gets out and what? Tries to get a job? She won't be able to afford college, let alone university. What happens if she gets sick or injured?'

'Will, I understand you are concerned for her, but you need to calm down,' Alana said, her voice raising for the first time. Will wanted to break something. 'Abigail will be put in a halfway house, with people who are familiar with helping people get back onto their feet and back into society.'

'But wouldn't it be preferable for her to stay with someone who already cares about her? Someone who understands her situation and has been helping her deal with it?' Will said, wanting to take an aspirin for the first time in days. He hadn't really thought about taking Abigail in once she had left the facility, but now that he was, it was making more and more sense to him.

'Have you talked to Abigail about this?' Alana said, sounding worried.

'No, I haven't. I hadn't really been thinking that far ahead yet,' Will said and Alana nodded, as though she had expected that answer. For a long moment she stood there studying him and Will tried to resist the urge to fidget, though it was only then he remember he had been making tea and poured the boiling water into his mug.

Finally, Alana heaved out a deep breath and said, 'We're not really getting anywhere, but could you at least think about what I have said? I know you want to be there for her, but you can't be her everyone. It won't help her and it will only hurt you.'

Will nodded. He would think about what Alana had said; he wouldn't be able to stop himself. Confidence in his own decision making had never been one of his strong suits and that was unlikely to change any time soon.

'Okay, well I brought you the number to call the jail and instructions for setting up a visit. I don't think you can really get out of that now that Mrs Hobbs has heard so much about you,' Alana said, a little grudgingly and fished out a piece of paper from her bag to hand to Will. Will took the paper, glancing at it briefly to see Alana's neat, flowing handwriting and placed the paper on the counter to deal with later.

'Do you know when Abigail is next planning on visiting?' Will said, as Alana's posture shifted into one which indicated her imminent departure.

Alana paused, pursing her lips for a moment, before she said, 'Saturday.'

'Well, thank you for coming by and for giving me this,' Will said, indicating the sheet of paper.

'Just take care of yourself, Will,' Alana said and a moments later she was gone.

Locked

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the long wait. I have been rather busy with assessment for uni and so haven't been writing as much. I really appreciate your patience and I will try and update more regularly.

The prison was grey. Grey walls, grey floors, grey bars. Grey. Grey. Grey. The white uniforms were startling and the orange jumpsuits completely out of place. Will supposed it would make identification easier, as the grey pallor to the alphas' skin would have caused them to fade into the background otherwise.

Will had never liked visiting prisons, though it was better than visiting Chilton. At least when he visited an alpha jail, he didn't feel as though everyone else expected him to wind up there in the end. At least he didn't half wonder the same thing.

Louise Hobbs was sitting in the cubicle closest to the far side wall. Seeing her now, he remembered seeing photos of her in the news, though the alpha before him was worn and tired. Her hair had clearly suffered from her incarceration, as the previously well cared for locks appeared oily and the natural appearance of her blonde hair was betrayed by the regrowth at the roots.

Will could feel her eyes on him from the moment he came into her line of sight, trying to determine if he was the one who was there to speak to her. It made him wonder, briefly, what she had imagined him to be like, or if she had tried to imagine him at all. Her blue eyes became shuttered as he approached and Will forced himself to remember who he was doing this for. Sitting down across from Louise, they looked at each other for a moment, before they both reached to pick up the phone beside them.

'Hello, I am Will Graham,' he said, feeling rather awkward. 'Abigail said you wanted to speak to me.'

'I.D. please?' Louise said and Will blinked, surprised by the question, but switched the phone to his left hand, so that he could reach into his pocket for his identification. Pulling it out, he pressed it against the glass divide and Louise leaned over to examine it closely, though Will doubted that she would have been able to tell if it was a forgery. 'I apologise, Mister Graham, I had to be sure. You wouldn't have been the first journalist to use tricks to get an interview and I expect there will be more.'

'Have you asked for stricter screening of visitors?' Will said, frowning as he put his I.D. away.

'I have, but the guards have greasy fingers,' Louise said. 'In any case, that isn't why you are here and I don't want to take up any more of your time than necessary. Tell me about yourself.'

'What do you want to know?' Will said, not really sure where to start.

'I don't really like that answer, Mister Graham. It makes me wonder if you are planning on not telling me everything I need to know to make sure my baby is safe,' Louise said and Will felt his eyebrows jerk up in response to her tone.

'Okay, fine. My name is William Graham. I am a thirty-nine-year-old omega. No, I don't have children, though I have recently entered a relationship with an alpha and we have been together for just over three weeks,' Will said, deciding to examine Louise's left ear. 'I currently have seven dogs and their names are Buster, Toffee, Willow, Cherry, Maggie, Joe and Winston. They are all former strays. Winston is the most recent. I spend a lot of time with each of them, and so all of them are well-trained have shown no inclinations towards violence...'

'Abigail said you work for the FBI?' Louise said, interrupting.

'Yes, though for the most part I only teach behavioural science. Recently, however, I have had my duties extended to profiling serial killers on an on-call basis,' Will said. 'Due to the...unique arrangement of my work, I am required to remain in contact with a psychiatrist, to ensure my continued well-being. Before I became a teacher, I worked in homicide, until injury, amongst other things, required me to resign.'

'Have you ever killed someone, Mister Graham?' Louise said and Will swallowed.

'I have never shot anyone, no,' Will said, feeling the echo of Abigail's question only weeks before.

Louise's eyes narrowed and Will wondered if she was going to ask him to specify, however she said, 'tell me about your alpha.'

Releasing a slow breath, Will said, 'his name is Doctor Hannibal Lecter. He is a psychiatrist who operates his own practice in Baltimore.' Louise nodded, closing her eyes for a moment in thought.

'Yes, I have read some of his work. He seems to enjoy writing about evolutionary psychology and how it is affected by social norms. I can't say that I completely agree with him, but he does raise some interesting questions that need to be examined, if only to dispute them,' Louise said.

'I was wondering where Abigail's interest in psychology came from,' Will said, surprised. 'Did you attend college, university?'

'No, I was a secretary for a psychologist for a number of years and I often had to edit their papers. After that, I found myself doing my own research in my free time,' Louise said. 'So

now that I have explained how I know about Doctor Lecter, give me your assessment of him personally.'

'Well, he's smart, confident...occasionally arrogant, he believes in courtesy and dislikes it when a person demonstrates a lack of self-control…Which does make me wonder how he manages to tolerate me, let alone date me,' Will said with a dry laugh. 'He is an excellent chef, speaks multiple languages and has a great love for the fine arts; which probably means I will get an offer to go to the opera at some point.'

'How is his relationship with Abigail, I presume they've met?' Louise said and Will paused, wondering what to say to that. Though Hannibal seemed fine with Abigail, she had revealed a level of distrust with Hannibal, which Will wasn't sure how to deal with.

'He respects my relationship with Abigail and seems to enjoy spending time with her,' Will said, as truthfully as he could manage. 'I think he might be keeping a bit of distance for the moment, though, so that I can spend more time with her.'

'Abigail told me that you have be allowing her to call Marissa,' Louise said, when she realised that was all Will was going to say on the topic.

'I felt it would be good for her to have a friend to rely on that she knew from before, to help ease the transition,' Will said, hoping he didn't sabotage himself with Louise by enabling Abigail to keep her friend.

'Have you spoken to Marissa?' Louise said, pushing a few strands of hair back behind her ear.

'I have, but not for very long. She is usually impatient to talk to Abigail, though I have heard a lot of stories about the two of them and what they have gotten up to,' Will said, suppressing a small smile of the memory of Abigail's enthusiastic story telling.

'And what, exactly, is your thoughts on their...friendship?' Louise said. Will blinked, feeling as though he missed something.

'Are you talking about Abigail's romantic feelings for Marissa?' Will said cautiously. Louise nodded, causing Will to frown. 'If you are asking if I have a problem with an alpha being with a beta, then you should probably know that I have dated a few of betas and even a couple of omegas. Though they, clearly, failed, it wasn't due to our gender.'

'What was it then?' Louise said.

'Have you heard of mirror neurons?' Will said, but wasn't surprised when Louise shook her head. 'Well, apparently we have them as kids to help us socialise and they are supposed to go away as we get older, but mine didn't. At a broad level, that means that I can understand other people a lot better than most, but at a personal level, I am more susceptible to picking up the little mannerisms of people around me, especially if I spend a lot of time with them. After a while, though, apparently it can make people a little uncomfortable.'

'How does that affect the strength of your...bonds?' Louise said and Will frowned, understanding what she was getting at.

'I may find myself slightly more attached, in a sense,' Will said quietly.

'And what sense is that?' Louise said and Will heaved out a breath.

'Not one that can really be explained easily,' Will said, wondering why he was telling Louise even half the things he had, when he would barely talk to Hannibal. 'A feedback loop, maybe?'

'I see,' Louise said. Will let the lie pass.

'Can I ask you something?' Will said, his question already hesitating on his lips.

'You want to ask about Garrett,' Louise said, her free arm crossing her chest, as if to brace herself. 'I've admitted why I killed him, what else is there you need to know?'

'Why did you choose to kill him? You could have contacted the police. You knew where the evidence was,' Will said, wanting to know why she had given up her freedom.

'Then what? People don't want to think about omegas as killers. They want alpha's. Alpha's make sense. We are the larger percentage,' Louise said, closing her eyes. 'Even if they did believe me, what if they showed up while Abigail was home? For all I know, he could have panicked and killed her or someone else.' That wasn't the whole reason, Will could just tell, but he allowed her the same grace as she had granted him and didn't ask further.

'You wanted to protect her, I get that,' Will said.

'How did you meet my daughter?' Louise said, taking control of herself again.

'Didn't Abigail tell you?' Will said.

'She told me why she was there,' Louise said, 'but she couldn't say why you were.'

'Jack Crawford, the, uh, head of Behavioural Sciences heard some rumours about what I can do and requested an interview to see if I would be suitable to help him with the case,' Will said, his left hand coming up to press against his right forearm, as though to support it. 'Abigail was in the waiting room. I probably wouldn't have spoken to her if she hadn't said anything. I mean, I suspected who she was, but I tend to keep to myself a lot.'

'Tell me about your friends...'

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Will was only too relieved when he was finally buckling his seatbelt in preparation to return home. The conversation, though it felt a bit more like an interrogation, went longer than Will would have thought it would. He could understand the reason for that, but it was hard for him

to convince someone that he was safe for their daughter to be around, when he wondered the same thing.

Hannibal would probably be wondering how he went. Abigail too. He knew he should probably call one or both of them, but he didn't really want to be talking to anyone right then. So instead, he just sat in his car and waited for his head to quiet, before starting up the car and heading home. He would talk to Abigail tomorrow.

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